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DECEMBER 1954

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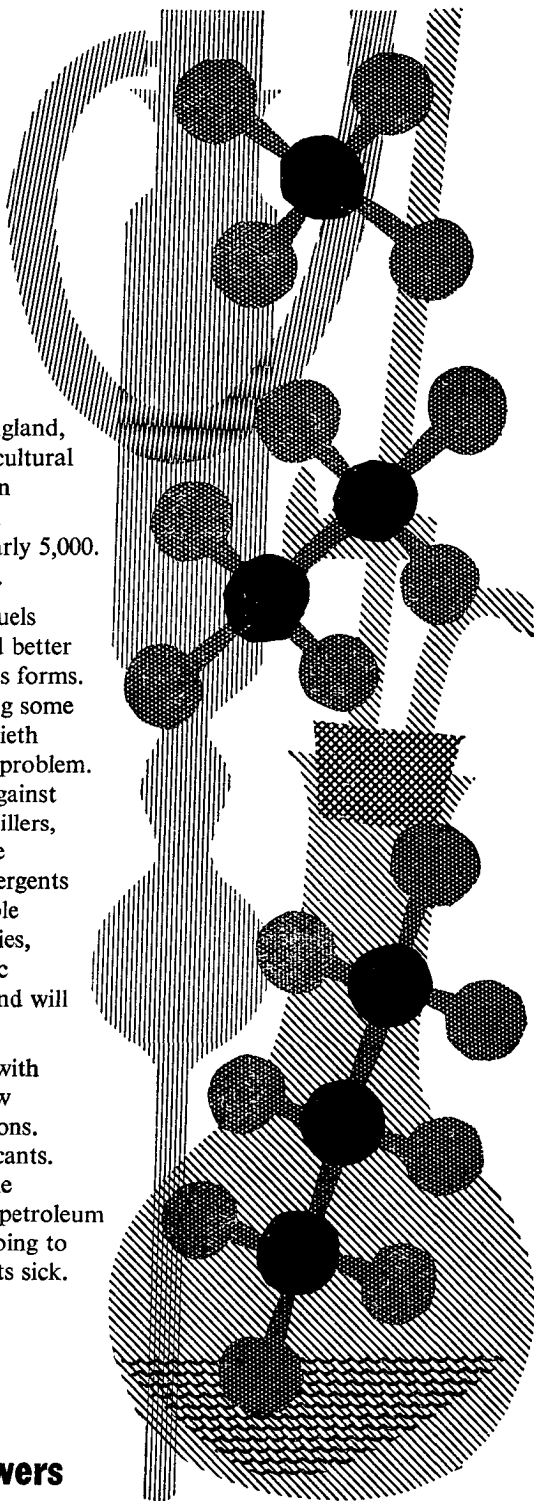
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Land through Love

I. *Hallam Tennyson* : A DYNASTY OF SAINTS

THOSE who give the religious life a new impulse need disciples to organise the impulse before it runs to seed. St. Paul worked out the laws to which Christ's followers, the "lawbreakers," should adhere, Asoka spread Buddhist pacifism over the length and breadth of India by force of arms. Such is the paradox by which politicians replace with a crown the halo of the saints. It is called balancing the temporal against the spiritual worlds: it allows new religions to survive. What kind of successor was one to expect for Mahatma Gandhi—would he be succeeded by a politician exploiting the aura of his saintliness, or by a saint turned temporarily politician?

The politicians were the first to be tested for the new role. They were already in the public eye and they had known and worked with the Mahatma for many years. But Nehru's passion for modernisation gave his reverence for the world's foremost opponent of industrialism a somewhat sentimental air, while President Prasad's honest, homespun figure sank into insignificance under the trappings of high office. Perhaps Gandhi was to have no successor: perhaps his appearance had been one of the odder contradictions of Tolstoy's theory that leaders are made by history. His social and economic ideas certainly seemed to have died with him. Those who still followed them—the "pure" Gandhian village workers scattered up and down the countryside—seemed spiritless and defeated. Inspiration had been replaced by piety.

Now all this has changed. Gandhi's successor

has emerged, and however unpredictable his emergence may have seemed at the time, in retrospect it has that quality of inevitability, that perfect interplay of character and circumstance, which we associate with all the best events of history.

VINOBA BHAVE joined Gandhi when he was nineteen. It was not till thirty-eight years later, at an age when most of us think of retiring, that he became known. Yet this long training in obscurity had one peculiar feature about it. Vinoba was twenty-five years younger than Gandhi, yet the Mahatma treated him as preceptor rather than pupil. He saw through to the man's quality. "To reach his spiritual attainments," he wrote to the young man's parents, "I have passed a lifetime of spiritual endeavour." Vinoba was the detached, philosophical ascetic that Gandhi at times regretted not having become. The British imprisoned him no more than twice—an unusually light ration for such a close associate. Yet anyone seeking to understand Gandhi's life and thought was sooner or later told to visit Vinoba's Ashram. "He understands my ideas better than I do myself," Gandhi said, looking at you disconcertingly.

Those who took the old man's advice—I myself did in 1946—were likely to be disappointed. Arriving at 8.15 a.m. I learnt that the period which Vinoba set aside for visitors was already over—for then, as now, he rose at 3 a.m.—and that he had launched on his hour of study. At the far end of the verandah I saw a bent back, a fringe of tousled hair, and

a pile of books—nothing more. Meanwhile a disciple had me in a corner while he enthused about the Master's asceticism. He had taken a vow of chastity at the age of ten. He had never faltered in it—unassailed, it seemed, by even the mildest of adolescent uncertainties. After flirting with the Bengal terrorists, Gandhi's doctrine of service to others through the renunciation of self had captured both his heart and mind. And thereafter he treated his "self" with a quiet severity that made Gandhi's own efforts look like the indulgence of a sybarite. He renounced the use of money—and its use by others on his behalf. For years he had gone nowhere except on his own feet. He fed entirely on curds and fruit juice, managing with this diet to control the stomach ulcer that he had contracted in prison. As a result he referred to his ulcer as the "blessing" since it had helped him still further to simplify an already spartan life. Before swallowing, he swilled the fluids for some time round his mouth: an act of pre-digestion not as tedious as Mr. Gladstone's, since the total quantity consumed was about equal to that given a ten-month-old baby.

I listened to this recital with a mixture of awe and scepticism. Such an abundance of high principles, such complete and calculated powerlessness, seemed unlikely ever to affect the workaday world. And when I heard that he had taught himself sixteen languages so as to be able to communicate with all sorts and conditions of men, I wondered what he could possibly say in them that others might want to hear. India's numerous religious enthusiasts provide the background from which the occasional religious genius emerges. That afternoon I placed Vinoba firmly among the enthusiasts.

"When Gandhi died, Vinoba became as loving as he," writes one of India's folk poets. It sums up the change that has taken place, as well as the hint of transmigration which many Indians see in it. And the new Vinoba, even if he is not a literal illustration of transmigration, certainly shows the foundation of fact on which the doctrine poetically embroiders. Vinoba himself has written "had Gandhi not died, how could I ever have dared to come forward?"

Gandhism was not, after all, due solely to the genius of one man. It was in the Indian air, and it was bound to break out again.

FIRST of all came the attempt to thrust Vinoba into greatness. He was invited to Delhi and installed near Gandhi's cremation ground. It was a stagey piece of symbolism which failed, for second-hand haloes don't fit, even when they are handed to you by others. Vinoba's words seemed to come from a world which India's capital had already forgotten. He withdrew to his five-acre plot to continue his experiment in self-sufficiency. It seemed unlikely that he would ever leave it.

In 1951 Gandhian village workers decided to hold their annual conference in Hyderabad. They begged Vinoba for leadership, saying that without him the conference would be valueless. When he declined to come, they told him that the conference would have to be cancelled. Reluctantly he gave way. But he would walk as usual, he said, and the journey would take him a full month. At that time large tracts of Hyderabad were dominated by Communists who had driven out, or murdered, the landlords and distributed their land among the poor. The province was spoken of as the Yenan of the New India. Entering Communist areas where armed police went in fear, Vinoba said: "What is needed is to keep cool and not to get panicky." He himself approached the Communists with calm and ruthless affection. "You are like doting mothers," he told them. "You love the masses and want to ruin everyone else for their sake. But doting mothers end by ruining their children, too." With every word that he spoke the man and the occasion seemed to be drawing closer together. It was in the small village of Pochempelli that they coincided. Forty "untouchable" families approached him. The Communists had given them land, they said, how could they not give the Communists their support? No one else had shown any interest in their misery.

That evening, at his prayer meeting, Vinoba appealed to the local landlords: "If you had five sons and a sixth was born to you, you would give him a portion of your estate. Treat me as your sixth son and give me

one-sixth of your land for re-distribution to *Daridranarayan*—God revealed in the poor.” A gaunt, intellectual figure, the village’s largest landlord, rose, nervously adjusting his spectacles. He offered a hundred acres, and the forty “untouchable” families, deciding how they could best divide the gift, said they could manage with as little as two acres each and returned twenty to the donor. It was this double act of generosity that provoked the *Bhoodan Yagna*, voluntary land sacrifice. There and then Vinoba decided to make the same appeal in every village through which he walked. Such was the unpremeditated, almost accidental origin of Free India’s first mass movement.

Today, three-and-a-half years later, Vinoba is the world’s richest landlord. He has walked 11,000 miles and acquired nearly 4 million acres of free gifts. He has set a target of no less than 50 million acres (one-sixth of India’s cultivable land) by the end of 1957. It seems excessive. But the target for this April—two-and-a-half million acres—was, in fact, exceeded by 700,000 acres, and when that was set it seemed excessive too. The man who before had scarcely seen himself in a mirror, now sees himself daily in the pages of the national press.

WHAT happens when an intellectual recluse suddenly becomes a mass leader? Vinoba’s bent, thin figure with its curiously velvety skin, his matted hair and beard and home-spun loincloth—these have remained the same. And yet there is a new quality about him, noticed even by those who always thought him capable of greatness. It is a quality most clearly mirrored in his eyes. Grey-green and youthful, they seem to quiver on the edge of mirth, as if some deep continual laughter was repressed for the sake of the gravity becoming to a saint. It surprises one at first, this laughter—for in India, modern religion often wears a long face, just as further West it assumes a hearty and synthetic grin. Vinoba reminds one what real religion means. No discord at the heart of things.

We spoke about the H-bomb. “Man is a rational being,” he said. “I hardly think him capable of planning his own destruction. Yet

if he does, it can only be in order to make way for a more successful substitute.” Vinoba can afford amusement because, even in 1954, he is without anxiety.

Vinoba has not just suddenly grown this sense of humour. He possessed one before, but lacked that certainty with others which would have made its expression possible. His own life touched the average, sensual world at too few points. His humour is very different from Gandhi’s—it relishes ideas rather than people. He spoke of material progress. “Our age has produced tons of happiness,” he said. “The sheer weight of it crushes us. Bags of sugar are carried by the bullock to make their way into the belly of the epicure: and the astonishing thing is that the epicure gets a bad liver and the bullock a broken back. Such is the miracle wrought by sugar, an article sweet beyond dispute.” Once I asked his permission to take a photograph. “Robbers don’t knock at the door before they break into the house,” Vinoba replied and he skipped out of my view-finder, laughing like a child who had escaped capture. “Next time remember you’re a thief and don’t advertise the fact.”

Like his humour, Vinoba’s gift for the simple trenchant phrase is a new discovery. His lectures on the Gita and the commentary which he is now dictating on Shankacharya (the Indian Aquinas) show the normal scholastic bent of his mind. When criticised with breaking up Indian land into tiny fragments through the redistribution carried out by the Land Gifts Mission, Vinoba quickly replied that the fragmentation of hearts concerned him more than that of holdings. Told that his ideas added up to Communism minus violence, he gave a cryptic smile: “Perhaps. But then you might say that two people were identical—except for the fact that one breathed and the other was a corpse.”

WHEN Gandhi died, Vinoba became as loving as he—but it was a different kind of love. N. K. Bose, in his brilliant and—in India—much criticised book, *My Days With Gandhi*, has suggested that Gandhi sublimated his sensual and emotional nature by gradually identifying himself with the opposite sex.

This is not unusual. Most saints are feminine in their relationship with God—it is the reason that makes sainthood the one profession in which women have produced a greater number of geniuses than men: in all languages, the word “soul” is of feminine gender. But with Gandhi the process went further than usual. He could not do without the comfort of continual female companionship. His grown-up grand-daughter called him “mother” and shared with him a large wooden cot, much to the horror of the more orthodox. Moslem women never kept *purdah* in his presence because, as he rejoiced in saying, they recognised him as “one of them.” And he became increasingly personal, affectionate, lovable, capricious, and teasing in his relationship with others—he delighted in pet names, for instance, and in treating every individual as his especial favourite: all characteristics which we normally associate with women. In return Gandhi gained the passionate devotion of those who were near him.

Vinoba is very different. He looks upon all men as the children of God and for that reason he treats them all equally, whereas Gandhi would have treated them differently because of the particular children they were. If a small girl creeps on to the platform while he is holding a meeting, Vinoba pats her absent-mindedly, but one feels he would do as much for anything else—animal or human—that happened to be near. Such impersonal, philosophical love will, of course, never inspire individual devotion in the same way as Gandhi did. Yet it has its advantages. Gandhi sometimes let emotion speak to him in the disguise of conscience. There were odd corners of bitterness. A tendency to brush aside argument with repetition of his own formulæ. Above all there was his attraction to power, a trait which he could not obscure by continually harping on his own helplessness and humility. It was perhaps the greatest triumph of his long life to have overcome this weakness in those last years when New India left him lonely and powerless on the heights where she had placed him.

In Vinoba's personality there are none of these dramatic and enigmatic contrasts.

All is clear and limpid. He accepts Gandhi's social and economic ideas—decentralisation, self-sufficient village republics at the base of the pyramid of state power, non-violent non-co-operation in place of armed resistance—but he defends them in a dispassionate and rational voice. He does not talk of the “music of the spinning wheel,” but rather of harnessing electricity to the villages so that the spindle in every home may be driven by power. He expects the impossible from himself but not from others. He is, for instance, still vigorously free from any entanglement with money—even wealth gifts to the *Bhoodan* Movement must be in work or kind, never in cash—but this is a personal witness to the ultimate social good, rather than any immediately practical policy which he expects others to follow. He divides machinery into labour-saving and labour-displacing categories. The first category—jeeps, microphones, electric torches—he accepts joyfully if not for his own use at least for the use of others: whereas Gandhi extended to them no more than a grudging tolerance. He has no fads about medicine. Being clear in his own mind that he is ready for death whenever it calls for him, he has decided that with so much work to do it is better, for the moment, to live. So he daily represses chronic malaria with Paludrin.

TO A Westerner used either to religious jollifiers or Jeremiahs, Vinoba's serene and restful trust in goodness will perhaps be his most impressive feature. “People call this an age of sin and degradation,” he says. “Yet how can that be? The Buddha is supposed to have lived in a time freer of sin than our own. Yet someone as great as he had to pay a heap of gold for a small parcel of land, while I, a mere humble devotee of God, have been entrusted with millions of acres as free gifts.” Landlords who meet him face to face cannot resist at least *pretending* to justify the boundless confidence which he places in them. In return for lost acres they gain local prestige and a saint's benevolent smile. A momentary glow diffuses them—have they not enrolled in a new crusade for righteousness? Such is the psychological transformation wrought by trust.

Not that Vinoba's trustfulness has any trace of sentimentality about it. He sees the whole man but picks out for preference those things in him which tend towards good. The choice is conscious. He criticises Christianity for laying so much stress on the darker side of man. Did Christ really hope to convert the Pharisees by cursing them? That, so Vinoba told me, is the one sure way of making people obstinate as well as wicked. When I asked him whether he seriously expected to obtain 50 million acres of land by the method of loving persuasion, he replied primly: "I shall wait until the method is squeezed dry before discussing what to do next." Yet in a Bihar village which he had visited three times without obtaining any substantial gift, I heard him promise to approach the absentee landlords personally on the peasants' behalf. Then I heard him add: "But if they still hold back, will you refuse to cultivate their fields?" and I guessed at once that Vinoba well knew all the steps that were open to him and that he refrained from disclosing them so that no taint of coercion should damage his present relations with the rich. Such unhurried and clear-headed restraint is surely heroic. "The task may take a thousand years or it may take one. It is in God's hands. I shall work as long as he needs me." But this is no excuse for dawdling. "In spite of monsoons or summer heat, the Ganges never stops, so why should I?"

Power is perhaps the one taste for which the appetite grows keener with the years. Yet a man so long content with obscurity, who had in the end to be prodded towards the limelight by his colleagues, is likely to be tempted less easily than most by the sin of Lucifer. There are so many points already at which, almost unnoticed, he could have deviated from principle for the sake of quick advantage. Two years ago the Government offered him ten million acres of uncultivated land which had reverted to the State. They asked him to distribute and develop it as he wished. And they "shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. . . ." But Vinoba did not take long to make up his mind. Land that belonged to the Government was the responsibility of the Government, he said.

Besides, he had come not to organise but to disperse. He has no faith in institutions. "People start institutions which in the end overwhelm their founders . . . who have not the courage to accept disillusion. . . . Majorities are but brute force." The Land Gifts Mission has no membership and it makes no resolutions—only vows. In spite of the social and economic ideas to which Vinoba gives increasing emphasis, he is clear that his own role is merely to bring about a change of heart in the people and to increase their moral power. If that is achieved it will be the duty of the people themselves to influence the existing political parties to an expression of the ideas that they have imbibed from him. It is by this means that Vinoba still manages to obtain the reverent support of all party leaders (even the Communists dare not openly criticise him). He himself remains, as he is never tired of repeating, a "mere humble outsider" who watches, with "agony and love," the burdens which his political friends are called upon to bear. But it is unlikely that the movement itself will long manage to remain in such a rarefied atmosphere. Sooner or later it is bound to grasp the fact that it has become one of the successors—perhaps the only possible successor—to a fast-declining Congress. That will be the signal for Vinoba to withdraw and for us to remember that he is not, like Gandhi, a politician-saint, but a saint temporarily on the fringe of politics. "I am like the fire. Fire does not worry whether we put a pot on it or not—or whether we use it for good or evil purposes. The function of fire is to burn."

GANDHI the politician succeeded, but Gandhi the saint failed—as saints always must. India was free but she was not converted. It was the prestige of the politician which deceived us into imagining conversion. At the end the old man himself saw more clearly than anyone what had happened. India's non-violence, he said, had been the non-violence of the weak, not of the strong. Had she possessed them, India would have fought with other weapons. Gandhi the politician needed no successor. That is why Vinoba sticks to the changing of hearts.

To attend one of Vinoba's prayer meetings is to have this hidden continuity made astonishingly real. He sits, like Gandhi, on a wooden bed dragged hastily from a nearby hut. All that needs conscious control and care—hair, beard, and horn-rimmed spectacles (with Gandhi it was the refusal to use false teeth)—is scruffy and neglected. For both of them ignore appearances. Yet all that is unconscious, all that comes from within, has beauty, grace, and style. The back is straight as a bamboo, the eyes unblinking, the gestures hieratic as if from some slow and ancient ritual that we had all forgotten. Like Gandhi, Vinoba has a frail voice, but his is the sweeter and better modulated. He, too, needs a microphone—for unamplified he is inaudible to an audience of more than twenty—making electricity still

an essential weapon in India's conquest by love. Vinoba never falters or repeats himself, even though he sometimes makes as many as four speeches a day. The effect may be oracular, but it is not falsely so. For like Gandhi, Vinoba makes no use of conscious oratory. His words, pointed and well-phrased, carry authority from the heart.

Vinoba never mentions his master by name when he is speaking in public. That is where he is so different from other successors: and the difference is significant. He is a candle, lit at a neighbouring flame, that burns now with its own steady and separate light. This is proof that it is not a new religion that has been founded, but a new dynasty. Only the Judges of Ancient Israel, perhaps, can supply a fitting parallel.

II. *Minoo R. Masani* : BHOODAN IN ACTION

A LONG time ago—in fact, nearly two thousand five hundred years back—in that part of India which we now know as Gaya district in the State of Bihar, a prince who had renounced his power and privileges wandered on foot and slept under trees in search of Enlightenment. This man, who had turned his back on the world, family, and home in order to find the Light by which he could discover and follow the Eightfold Path, was called Gautama Buddha (Gautama the Enlightened or Wise). He wandered for six years through the woods and forests, seeking Enlightenment about the source of human sorrow and suffering by resorting to one form after another of mortification of the flesh. But no

Light resulted. Realising that perhaps self-mortification was not the way, he ceased his wanderings and went to sit in the shade of a tree called the Bodhi tree and meditated there, resolving not to leave that seat until Enlightenment came. For seven years, the Buddha contemplated and it was during this time that he arrived at the law of Karma, by which every act of good or evil is rewarded or punished in this or some later incarnation, and the transcendence of this law by the extinguishing of the self in Nirvana. The place at which Enlightenment came is named Bodh Gaya, a suburb of the modern city of Gaya. Even now, visitors are shown the Bodhi tree under which it is claimed the Buddha sat.

It is said that history never repeats itself. If this axiom is true, there must be exceptions that prove the rule. For it is a fact that, after an interval of twenty-four centuries of human history, the hills and the woods and the rivers of Gaya saw once again a sage wandering through the countryside carrying the message of the true Dharma.

The villagers knew him as Sant Vinoba, the world as Acharya Vinoba Bhave, Mahatma Gandhiji's chosen disciple. In 1941, Gandhiji—then engaged in giving expression to the distaste of the Indian people at being involved by their British rulers without their consent in World War II—had looked around for the man most fitted to open his campaign of individual *satyagraha* (civil disobedience) by being the first to offer himself for arrest. His choice had fallen on Vinoba Bhave. This was a great honour; India was full of patriots, many with big reputations and great popularity, yet Gandhiji with his unerring instinct had chosen as *satyagrahi* No. 1, and his chosen disciple, the obscure little man who had lived quietly in his Ashram.

It was this Vinoba who now, thirteen years later, had established himself in the countryside of Gaya, engaged in the task of inducing those with surplus land to part with it voluntarily to the landless. During his wanderings he had gathered a great deal of land, 1,130,000 acres in Gaya district and over 3½ million acres in the country as a whole. Also, he had gathered round him a band of devoted and disciplined followers pledged to his creed of *Bhoodan Yagna* (Land Gift). Among these was none other than the leading socialist of India, American-educated, one-time Marxist Jayaprakash Narayan, who had for twenty years been the General Secretary and unquestioned leader of India's Socialist Party. Jayaprakash had now made a gift of his life (*Jeevan Dan*) to this new cause. It was on a brief visit to my old friend and co-secretary of the Congress Socialist Party in the thirties, and now my colleague in the Indian Committee for Cultural Freedom, that I found myself on the morning of March 6th, 1954, speeding northwards to Jahanabad in a jeep which had been sent to Gaya city to collect me.

JAHANABAD is the headquarters of a subdivision and lies about midway between Gaya and Patna. It was not there, however, that I found Jayaprakash but in the little village of Kalpa some five or six miles away. Through little lanes between huts in the village, the jeep was piloted till it came to a stop outside the village library. On the verandah of this little institution sat Jayaprakash holding counsel with some leading inhabitants of the village.

Soon after I reached it, this small informal meeting broke up and everyone started moving towards a plot of ground on the fringe of the inhabited area which was decorated with flags and bunting. There was a little platform on which half-a-dozen people could sit and in a corner near the platform was a small radio-set with an amplifier tied to a post. Gradually, the crowd collected at the meeting place. The front rows of the audience consisted of small children, something which I was to notice at most meetings during the next four days.

The proceedings opened with a song about *Bhoodan Yagna* sung by a young woman graduate in Law of Madras University. A young man from the village then got up and started reading an address of welcome to Jayaprakash. After he had concluded, Jayaprakash responded to the welcome but stressed that what he was after was not *manpatras* (addresses) but *danpatras* (gift-deeds).

Then Jayaprakash, sitting on a chair on the platform, started chatting with his modest audience. After a few minutes, he noticed that two old men were squatting under a tree, a little removed from the main body of the meeting. Since the loudspeaker had refused to function—an occurrence not unusual in this campaign—and it was doubtful whether the old gentlemen could follow the proceedings, Jayaprakash strolled over to them and invited them to come and join the congregation. He assured them that they would not be making any commitment to donate land if they did so and would be perfectly free to leave the meeting at the end with their property intact. Encouraged by this, the cagey old men moved closer and joined the crowd. A few minutes after Jayaprakash had resumed his address, a child in the audience started crying because his

little neighbour had done something to tease him and the speech had to be interrupted again for a minute to enable silence to be restored.

A little later in the proceedings, an unpunctual member of the audience rode up to the meeting across the fields on his little pony. The front ranks of the audience melted away and gathered round the pony in great excitement. One or two boys tried to clamber on to the back of the pony. Showing no sign of irritation, Jayaprakash asked in some amusement what all the excitement was about.

"It is a pony," answered some children.

"Yes, I see, but so what?" asked Jayaprakash.

"But we have not seen a pony for a long time," retorted a child, and so the meeting adjourned once again until the rival show concluded and the pony was led away to a safe distance, the cynosure of juvenile eyes.

I WAS to listen to several speeches by Jayaprakash at other villages on our route. Each speech differed a little from the one that had gone before. There were local questions and local problems to deal with, but the gist of the message remained more or less the same. Here, as I recall it, is the essence of Jayaprakash's appeal to the villagers of Jahanabad subdivision.

"We live," Jayaprakash would start by saying, "in an age of moral corruption. Why is this so? This is so because God made man to be happy but man has departed from the path of *dharma*, which is to be happy in another's joy and sad in another's sorrow." Jayaprakash would then compare the behaviour of human beings with that of dogs scrapping for a bone, each for himself. He would refer to the recent panic of pilgrims at Allahabad to which some people from Gaya district had gone and returned and say: "Some people go to the Ganges to wash off their sins and get purified. But the Ganges is right here and *shuddhi* (purification) can be had at home also. If you wish to be purified, you do not have to go all the way to Allahabad."

Having thus started by making a moral appeal to his listeners, Jayaprakash would come down to earth and stress the fact that this was

an era of change: "You see profound changes taking place around you in the world. The British Raj which you knew for many years has gone, so have the Maharajah. The zamindar who was with you till the other day has also gone now."

Then he would ask: "Do you think the world will now remain as it is for eternity? Is there any reason why it should now stop changing? I can assure you it is not so. That is not the nature of the Universe, in which there is constant change. For one thing, the landless will not let it rest as it is. Some people have too much land, while others have none. Land must and will be more justly redistributed. Further changes must come, one way or the other."

Then Jayaprakash would turn to other countries in the world, and particularly to Russia and China, and point out how certain changes which had become overdue had come about there. "In Russia," he would say, "they came with violence, brutality, and murder. They have done no one any good." He would point out that in Telengana a similar effort resulted in at least three thousand people being killed and millions of rupees worth of property being destroyed. "The bigger revolution is to bring about change peacefully and through love," he would urge. "Let those with a lot of land give away the surplus, let the middle peasants give away a sixth part of their land, and let even the poor give just a tiny bit as a token of their participation."

Answering those who asked why they should not wait for a law to be passed for the redistribution of land, Jayaprakash would say: "Certainly, let laws be passed to redistribute the land fairly. But what merit is there for the man who waits to be dispossessed by virtue of law? What merit is there for the zamindar who has been expropriated by law? Does anyone remember his name or sing his praises? Do you need a law to be passed before you desist from theft? Of course not. Self-redemption cannot come from above or without. There is little difference between the sword and the law. Both are coercive."

Jayaprakash would then seek to reassure his listeners that he was not trying to frighten

them into parting with their land under threat of violent dispossession. "Don't think I am threatening you. As Vinobaji says I am awakening you from sleep to warn you of a snake near by."

"**B**HOODAN," Jayaprakash would say, "is thus a great mass movement of conversion and the creation of a new climate of thought and values of life. It brings about a living and immediate revolution in the minds of men and their mutual relationships. It attacks and corrects here and now the system of exploitation and inequality. It teaches men to share what they have with their fellowmen."

"This revolutionary process could have been started in any other sphere than the agrarian. But this field was taken first because land is a primary source of production; the land problem is a most urgent one; it affects the vast majority of our rural country. But above all because it was possible through the medium of land to put across the new economic idea and the new social ethics much easier than through the medium of any other kind of property. What Bhoodan says about land is, according to Gandhiji, true of all our possessions, including even know-how and skill. All wealth is a social product and no earning is possible without social cooperation. Whatever we possess, therefore, belongs to society. We are no more than the trustees of what we have, implicitly charged by society to take good care of our trust and use it for the benefit, not of ourselves, but of all our fellowmen. But whereas in the agrarian sphere the idea that land, being a gift of nature, belongs to the community is easily accepted, in the commercial, industrial, or professional field, the corresponding idea would be difficult of general acceptance. But when Bhoodan has sown the seeds of this idea in five lakhs* of our villages and persuaded lakhs of land-owners to accept it in practice, even if partially, a psychological climate will have been created for the idea to take root and grow in other fields also."

"In the context of Bhoodan, material con-

struction becomes creative, in its absence it remains a dead activity. Bhoodan is like the flowing river, constructive activities the boats. Without the moving water the boats are static objects stuck in the mud. But the river gives them motion and life and then they carry their passengers to their destination."

"Bhoodan does not aim at capturing the state in order to use it for its ends. As a corollary, it does not wish to create or become a political party in order to capture the state. It aims rather at persuading the people, independently of what the state may or may not want, to carry out a revolution in their own lives, and through that a revolution in society. It aims further at creating those conditions in which the people may manage their affairs directly, without the intermediation of parties and parliaments. Gandhism, like anarchism or communism, visualises ultimately a stateless society. In the present world the state not only in its totalitarian form but also in its welfare variety is assuming larger and larger powers and responsibilities. The welfare state, in the name of welfare, threatens as much to enslave man to the state as does the totalitarian state. The people must cry halt to this creeping paralysis. The fact that the welfare state is a creature of the people, in the sense that it is set up by them, does not affect the matter. The device of democratic elections cannot equate 500 representatives with eighteen crores* (counting only the adults) of the people. To the extent the eighteen crores look after their affairs directly, to that extent the powers and functions of the state are restricted and real democracy is practised."

"The response of Bodh Gaya has been wonderful. But it is not enough. The work to be done is stupendous," Jayaprakash would conclude. "Not less than 50 million acres of land have to be collected. The donated lands have to be distributed. The landless have to be provided with the means of utilisation. In the villages where Bhoodan has succeeded, a new order has to be created. *Gram Rajya* (village rule) in 500,000 villages, *Sampati-Dan* (gifts of wealth) in the towns and cities, ultimately

* One lakh = 100,000.

* One crore = 100 lakhs.

transformation of capitalism into trusteeship. And many other things.”

LATER that afternoon, Jayaprakash and his party walked through the fields to another village named Jamuk where a bigger meeting was waiting to greet him and hear him. Here again the loudspeaker failed, but Jayaprakash's words reached the heart of every man and woman and child present. As the meeting ended, it had already got dark and Jayaprakash was, with his party, taken to the farmhouse where they were to spend the night. It was the home of one of the “biggest” farmers in the village. It had three or four rooms and a verandah.

Early next morning, when I was strolling in the fields and enjoying the freshness of the dawn, I was told the family's story by the old head of the family. Till the previous day, he was the proud owner of some fifty acres of land. This morning he had no land left. At the prompting of his son, Jadunandan “Azad,” he had donated all his land in answer to the call of *Bhoodan Yagna*. It was with a mixture of pride and sadness that the old man told me his story. He had sent his son to Patna to be educated and Jadunandan had come home a Bachelor of Arts—the only graduate in all the villages around Jamuk. “Other people's sons, when they come back from college, start earning money and adding to the family wealth; but my son,” sadly related the old man, “has never brought a pie home. While in the college he became a socialist and he has spent all his time, since he returned, in public service and in helping the poor. Now he has persuaded us to give away our land. What will happen to us now? Who will look after us when we are sick? And how will I get my young daughters married? I don't know,” he said, shaking his head.

After breakfast, we started on our trek again. At the next village of Surungapur, we camped for a while. A succession of visitors came to call on Jayaprakash at his place of rest and then, before the time came to move on to the next village, a village meeting convened. It started with a song. Just as Jayaprakash was going to start speaking, a handbill was placed

in his hands which had been issued over the name of the Jahanabad Kisan Sabha and the Jahanabad Democratic Youth League. The title of the leaflet was: “Beware of the net of illusion of *Bhoodan Yagna*. Whose friends are Vinobaji and ‘Revolutionary Socialist’ Jayaprakash?” For the rest of the sheet, the leaflet went on to malign Vinobaji and Jayaprakash and suggest that they were enemies of the peasants who had come to mislead them and divert their attention from the real class struggle. A set of questions addressed to Jayaprakash by an anonymous questioner also reached the platform. The tenor of the questions was the same as that of the leaflet.

Jayaprakash read the handbill and the questions to his listeners and, apart from his usual talk, he spent a lot of time in answering these questions for their benefit. He started by saying that he had no use whatsoever for the kind of society that had come into existence in Russia and China. He disliked it a hundred per cent. What had the people in Russia got? Certainly not what Lenin had wanted. Not the peasants and workers but those who controlled the Red Army and the Secret Police were enjoying the fruits of the revolution. Stalin's had been a reign of terror. Such people still ruled Russia after his death. In a dictatorship there can be no rule of the people, as there is in India under its present democratic Constitution.

Jayaprakash then patiently explained to the peasants, perhaps for the first time in their lives, what had been happening in Russia and how on Stalin's death Malenkov, Beria, and Molotov had jointly seized power. He then spoke about their quarrels and about Beria's liquidation, and asked: “Who decided for Malenkov or against Beria?” It was not the people, but the Red Army tanks which were stronger than the Secret Police. The man with the biggest gun won. Even wealth was not distributed. One man got a hundred times as much as another. Inequalities had increased. A new caste system had sprung up, and new exploiters ruled in place of the old.

In this village the response to the call for gifts of land was not as good as in Jamuk. A lot of *danpatras* (gift deeds) were signed but the

amount of land donated was small. Some people who had quite a lot of land did not give away a sixth of it. They did not give away even a tenth or a twelfth. Some donated even less than a twentieth part.

Jayaprakash was sad at this lack of generosity. He told them that from a poor man he was prepared to take even a small patch of land but from one who had much land he found it difficult to accept such tiny fragments. If they were making these gifts not from their hearts but just to get rid of him, he would return their *danpatras* and ask them to think the matter over quietly when he was no longer with them.

The meeting concluded and we started on our trek to the next village. On the way I asked Jayaprakash whether those whom he had thus reproached would not be only too happy to get back their *danpatras* and to call it a day. I said I could imagine many people in Bombay who would be relieved at this offer to return their donations. Jayaprakash thought that their reaction to his words would be different.

Later that afternoon, we reached the village of Sikharia where a warm welcome awaited us

and Jayaprakash was greeted with a shouting of slogans and even a band striking up a tune. We went into the school-house where quarters for the night had been prepared for us, and were resting a few minutes before Jayaprakash commenced addressing the crowd that had gathered to hear him, when into the room, somewhat breathless and panting, came a couple of men we had left behind in Surungapur. When asked by Jayaprakash what they were doing in this village and why they were not at home, they explained that they had been sent by their village with a message for him. After Jayaprakash had left their village, they had felt very unhappy and had gathered to take counsel. The result was that they had sent a message to say that they were sorry for what had happened earlier that day and that new *danpatras* were now being prepared which would satisfy Jayaprakash that the message of Bhoodan had really reached them.

Jayaprakash turned to me with a merry laugh and said: "You see." He thanked the men and said "*Shabash*" (Well done), and asked them to go home happy to their village. And I thought to myself: "What little faith we of the cities have in our fellowmen!"

Louis MacNeice

A Handful of Snapshots

THE LEFT-BEHIND

PEERING into your stout you see a past of lazybeds,
A liner moving west, leaving the husk of home,
Its white wake lashing round your pimpled haycocks.
Drink up, Rip MacWinkle. The night is old.

Where can you find a fire that burns and gives no warmth?
Where is the tall ship that chose to run on a rock?
Where are there more fish than ever filled the ocean?
Where can you find a clock that strikes when it has stopped?

Oh, poverty is the fire that burns and gives no warmth.
My youth is the tall ship that chose to run on a rock.
Men yet unborn could more than fill the ocean,
And death is the black clock that strikes when it has stopped.

My glass is low and I lack money to fill it,
I gaze on the black dregs and the yellow scum,
And the night is old and a nightbird calls me away
To what now is only mine and soon will be no one's home.

THE BACK-AGAIN

BACK for his holiday from across the water
He fishes with spinners or a rubber eel,
Fishes for mackerel or pollock but also for something
That he remembers now more by the feel
Of the jigging line than by how it looked when landed.

If it was ever landed. Sitting beside his father,
Whose eyes are smoozed with distance, he talks of crops
And weather but would prefer to talk of something
For which he has no words. Till the talk stops
And the fire inside and the rain outside are silent;

And his thoughts return to the city as he fingers
His city tie, thinking he has made good,
Gone up in the world, on the whole, were it not for something,
Intuited perhaps though never understood,
Which flitted through this room around his cradle.

So, on his last day, walking beside his brother,
Whose dog like a black thought streaks through ditch and fence
Rounding up sheep, he sees in his brother a sudden something:
An oaf, but an oaf with dignity and the sense
That it is a fine day if it rains only a little.

THE GONE-TOMORROW

TWO years high by the world wide,
It scatters pebbles on every side,
It takes two hands to cake or cup,
It pulls the tails of puss and pup.

And the blaze of whins, the smell of turf,
The squelch of mud, the belch of surf,
The slop of porridge, the squawk of gulls,
Enter that smallest of small skulls.

Which some day, skull and nothing more,
Will lie in a box on a foreign shore,
Nor will those empty sockets be,
Like sea-shells, mindful of the sea.

For mottled fields and marbled foam,
Cries of birds and smells of home,
Will all have vanished and the skies
Have lost their blue like those blue eyes.

THE ONCE-IN-PASSING

AND here the cross on the window means myself
But that window does not open;
Born here, I should have proved a different self.
Such vistas dare not open;
For what can walk or talk without tongue or feet?

Here for a month to spend but not to earn,
How could I even imagine

Such a life here that I, my selves, could earn
The lives my selves imagine?
For what takes root or grows that owns no root?

Yet here for a month, and for this once in passing,
I can imagine at least
The permanence of what passes
As though the window opened
And the ancient cross on the hillside meant myself.

THE HERE-AND-NEVER

HERE it was here and now, but never
There and now or here and then.
Ragweed grows where a house dies
Whose children are no longer children,
And what you see when you close your eyes
Is here and never: never again.

Here it was coming and going, but never
Coming the same, or the same gone.
New York is not so far by post
But the posted photograph seems only
The twitch of a corpse, the gift of a ghost,
The winter of a spring that shone.

Here it was living and dying, but never
Lifelong dying or dead-alive.
Few were few but all knew all,
The all were few and therefore many,
Landscape and seascape at one's call,
The senses five or more than five.

So now, which here should mean for ever,
And here which now is the now of men,
They come and go, they live and die,
Ruins to rock but rock to houses,
And here means now to the opened eye
And now means ever, though never again.

Harold Rosenberg

French Silence and American Poetry

THE best French poetry since Baudelaire has been enlisted in a siege against the cliché. This has not been by any means merely a question of taste. It has been more a matter of life and death.

Any educated Frenchman can make up a poem, just as any American can improvise a new "popular" tune. The French language is heavy with old literature, as the American air is loaded with *ta tá, ta ta tá*.

In France a word, as soon as it enters the mind, begins rolling down into a fine ready-made phrase. No leaf can fall except into an endless series of poetic mirrors of autumn. To get a glimpse of his actual mistress, the Frenchman has to invent ways of singling her out in a bath-house full of literary twins.

The Frenchman has so much tradition he can easily say anything, except what he wants to say.

To be conscious of his own feelings, to see with his own eyes, he must restore freshness to his language. This is a magical undertaking that can only be carried on by poetry, and which marks certain non-versified writings as indubitably poetry.

In order to think, the Frenchman has to be a poet. It is no use being a philosopher. He will be too glib. Everybody knows that Bergson made ideas roll so smoothly they washed right through metaphysics, simply leaving it cleaner, but without much grit for the professionals to put under the microscope.

Yet, while gliding like surf around the coral reefs of philosophy, Bergson's thought did

succeed in tracing its own verbal design. Thus the poets immediately recognised him as one of themselves, as a man who knew how to speak, whose perception communicated itself through his style.

LIFTING up a word and putting a space around it has been the conscious enterprise of serious French poetry since Baudelaire and Rimbaud. With this "alchemy," poetry dissolves traditional preconceptions and brings one face to face with existence, and with inspiration.

A French poet refers to the "fragility" of the commonplace. Of course. The commonplace is a perspective to which the observer is held by a web of vocabulary. It turns to dust when the acid of poetry burns each word away from the old links.

Poetry as verbal alchemy is a way of experiencing, never the expression or illustration of a "philosophy." It neither begins with ideas nor ends with them. It means getting along without the guidance of generalisations, which is the most difficult thing in the world.

For instance, Valéry denied he was a "philosophical poet," on the grounds that philosophy and poetry, each consisting of its own "apparatus," cannot be reconciled. It is in the words "*je te chéris, éclat qui semblait me connaître . . .*" that Valéry consciously lives, once and for all, the experience of reality's love for the human creature.

Claudel, in contrast, has the *idea* of such a relation. His doctrine tells him that God and the universe are on his side, and he tries to feel

and express this. But there is no verbal alchemy in his

Salut donc, ô monde nouveau à mes yeux, ô monde maintenant total !

O credo entier des choses visibles et invisibles, ie vous accepte avec un cœur catholique.

FRENCH poetry has a lot to say about silence. The poet feels a tremendous need to turn off the belt-line of rhetoric that keeps automatically pounding away in his brain twenty-four hours a day. Before anything can happen, this cultural clatter must be stopped.

The silence of the French poet arises on the opposite side of the globe from the silence of the Kansas farmhand. With the latter, silence just *is*, an emptiness coming from American space and time. The Frenchman has to will his silence, he struggles for it, in it he purifies himself of the past, makes himself ready for a new word, a round word, that can be his own and can open to him a continent of things.

In the end, he is in the same position as the Kansas farmhand after all—sitting on a rail and waiting for something to show up. Whatever it is, it will be something totally real.

MALLARMÉ and Valéry try to extricate the word that is a thing from the old poetry. That gives them the look of classicists or traditionalists. They seem direct opponents of the radical dadaists or surrealists, whose method is to pick up in the streets a word that has never been in a poem before. Certainly, different kinds of poems will result from beginning inside of poetry to restore words to innocence than from beginning outside of it to find innocent words.

But when Mallarmé or Valéry cuts the word “palm” out of the old poetry in order to make it into a finger touching a new experience (“*simple doigt de l’air*”), is not this motive the same as that of the dadaist who invites into poetry “sardine can” which is nothing else than experience?

All the French alchemists are after the same thing, the actuality which is always new—and which will only come out of the silencing of the existing rhetoric.

Their poetry is an adventure, through and through. It cannot be written without placing their lives in jeopardy. Of course, Valéry in his study looks quite secure. Just the same, there was no way of knowing what might befall him during those researches. . . . It is a fact that he stopped writing for many years. His condition might well have resulted in something much more serious.

Mounting straight up into the thinnest ethers of consciousness in search of the demons that may lurk there (or worse, that may not lurk there but leave the poet lost in an empty waste of the eternal, with its boredom and yet with its fascination that ruins for him everything living)—every such pioneer flight repeats those sailings on seas whose borders the cartographers had decorated with monsters. No classicist with his legs twined tightly around his philosophy and the tradition of art goes in for such expeditions.

VALÉRY has said that poetry is an exercise. With this the academician will hasten to agree. The propagandist, too, to the extent that “exercise” means the acquisition and utilisation of skill.

But to Valéry his own life was also an exercise. Without this equation: verbal substance = living substance, every principle he announced appears in reverse.

KEEPING in mind the silence of the farmhand and the inevitable non-rhetoric of the word that breaks it, we can understand why the French were the first to appreciate *American*. About twenty years ago, René Taupin pointed out that poets in America were lucky in having a lingo that hadn’t yet settled into a literary language.

The revival of American poetry around World War I and the 1920’s depended on an awareness of this luck, in which the French consciousness played a leading part. The poets who spoke American best—William Carlos Williams, E. E. Cummings, Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, Marianne Moore, T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens—had all enthusiastically frenchified. They learned from Paris what it

meant to find a word that was free of poetry, or that stuck out of it at an angle.

"Call the roller of big cigars," Stevens, the most conventional of them in form, begins "The Emperor of Ice Cream." With cigars and ice cream, billboards and wheelbarrows, American poetry became the poet's act of thinking his life, i.e., verbalising its novelty, an act not "assimilable" to any previous poetry, however much critics who see no significance in the will and the need to do something *new* might try to assimilate its "meaning."

THEN a depressing series of events took place. First, a new generation of American poets found they had a philosophy, Marxism. With this doctrine it made no difference what the poet experienced, so long as he expressed the doctrine. The best expression would be the one most useful in getting to readers. This meant using traditional verse forms and familiar poetic language. The "common" language of American poetry is *English*.

The cliché was restored to a premium. In time this led the Marxist poets to Hollywood, which is America's version of literary tradition, its treasury of poetic platitudes.

American poetry might have wriggled out of Marxism without too much damage, or even done something with it, as one or two of the surrealists did. But having forgotten its French lesson regarding the space around words necessary for consciousness, it began hunting for speech in tradition. The turn towards tradition was too much for it.

Beyond Hollywood, tradition can mean only one thing for Americans—back to England. In the past fifteen years, American poetry has become English again.

To be a radical or a fascist, an American must turn to the ideas of the Continent. To be respectable, he need only learn to love Merrie Olde Englande. The foreign relations of American poetry were divided between Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot.

AMERICAN poetry has never been deeper than it is today in English school-books. Unfortunately, though, not so far in as to reach the Elizabethans.

The Elizabethans are not tradition. They, too, think in their poetry and don't know where they will come out. They gather up every novelty and run an open bazaar of language, putting space around their words. A tradition must make itself superior to such acts of consciousness—that is its whole point, to make thinking unnecessary or, at least, safe.

Like a philosophy, tradition asserts that the important thinking has been done before the poet started to write his poem. The poem is thus an entertainment, or an illustration of the traditional conviction. The new traditionalists have done their best to compress the Elizabethans into their "order" or to show the weaknesses of their thought.

Convinced by Marxism, by psychoanalysis, by "science," that the truth was already in existence elsewhere than in the poem, the Americans were softened up for Anglicanisation. Once this had taken place, it did not matter if some also added Catholicism.

For American poetry, France has meant experiment, risk, perception, conversion of the every-day. England means a poetry of comments that sound like poetry.

THE chief Pied Piper to *The Oxford Book of English Verse* was, of course, Eliot. He had learned to think his feelings by way of French symbolism. But his own thinking was not enough for him. Sometimes he gave the impression that it made him sick. He needed other thoughts—those of Maurras and the French reaction. Finally, he needed the thoughts of the Church.

The combination in Eliot of poet and academician, word-specialist and snob, made him destructive in the moment of America's decline in poetic and individual independence. With his famous formula of the supremacy of tradition over individual talent, he succeeded in making poetry appear as a *thing*, to which a certain caste had given itself as to a minor trade.

On this premise, the French concept of the not-to-be-duplicated word emerging from the unknown was perverted into the petty guild rule of "precision," which enabled Eliot to

stamp REJECT on the keenness of Blake and the brightness of Shelley, and which let loose on poetry a mob of professors determined to make their logic the last word regarding the meaning of an image. In this triumph he was aided by the disconcerting triviality of the semanticists and the "scientific" criticism.

In his own verse, Eliot continued to preserve silence as a source—though a silence protected by dogma. For those, however, who accepted his "classicism" as the term for their refusal to test their own power, it was left only to keep busy.

With poetry separated from the act of discovery, the poet as a maker of verses could circulate at will from terminus to terminus of the Moscow-Hollywood-Rome axis. By simply redefining "tradition," he could drop an offering, one after another, in all three repositories of authority, usefulness, and the captive audience.

WHOEVER speaks the American language is forced into romanticism. His strictest discipline is itself a spiritual oddity, and gives birth to an oddity—as witness *The Scarlet Letter*, Emily Dickinson, the early gas engine. The American landscape is not easily mistaken for an endless wallpaper of nymphs and fountains—in the American language it takes hard application to achieve academic deadness. Precisely the fact that it gives them something to do and keeps them out of trouble is perhaps what makes the filing cabinets of tradition so desirable to the morally insecure.

But homeopathy apart, the American poetic impulse in this century has been given its most intimate hints towards self-knowledge by the French poetry of immediate presences, in which Poe's psychic experiments, Whitman's vocabulary of objects, and the strange American fact have been steadily growing more intelligible.

Ignazio Silone

The Choice of Comrades

THE last forty years have witnessed the collapse of most of the great politico-social myths bequeathed to us by the 19th century. As a result, certain kinds of people who had relied on these myths as a compass find themselves in a state of spiritual vagueness and ambiguity that is still far from being clarified. This situation is one aspect of the general crisis of capitalism and anti-capitalism. We are confronted with the need for reassessment, not only of the problem of how to behave but also of the greater question of the meaning of our existence. It is not a matter, be it said, even in its subsidiary aspects, of literary diversion. There will always be a number of perfectly respectable people who interpret in their own fashion, by their haircut or the way they knot their ties, the spirit of the age in which they live. For others less fortunate, however, times of crisis may bring graver consequences. My concern in these pages is with them.

Suicide among writers in various countries during the past thirty years has reached an unparalleled figure. It seems to me that however much they may differ outwardly, the majority of these episodes have a common source: what Nietzsche called the nihilism of modern times. Whenever I happen to consider the sense of bewilderment, tedium, and disgust characteristic of our age, my mind turns not to the books of Heidegger, Jaspers, and Sartre but to the suicides of Essenin, Majakowsky, Ernst Toller, Kurt Tucholsky, Stefan Zweig, Klaus Mann, Drieu La Rochelle, F. O. Matthiessen, Cesare Pavese, and other lesser-known figures.

What a flock of terrifying ghosts! Persecution, exile, isolation, poverty, illness, abnormality—one or other of these external reasons has been suggested in each case to explain how a man of talent could have sought such a desperate end. But the last writings of these men before death, or their last confidences to their friends, are invariably a confession of anguish or despair at the effort and the futility of living.

These suicides are not to be easily explained away. To pin responsibility for them on any one political régime would clearly be a misrepresentation, since we know that they occurred under widely differing régimes, in Russia, America, and Western Europe. Still less can we blame the pernicious influence of some pessimistic doctrine; Majakowsky was the poet of a victorious revolution, and the others, from Zweig to Pavese, were deeply rooted in the humanist or religious traditions of the society from which they came. (Indeed, one might well reverse the explanation and say it was precisely because they were not pessimistic enough, because they had banished *Angst* from their doctrine and their art, that some of them were to end by succumbing to it so miserably. Inhibition is more deadly than sincerity.)

The decadence of our age, however, had already begun prior to these tragic episodes. It has not merely engulfed a number of cultivated and hypersensitive individuals; it has invaded entire classes and institutions, not even sparing the people. Nietzsche was the first to define this decadence, calling it nihilism, as I

said, and giving the word a new meaning that it has retained, a meaning different from that found in Turgenev's famous novel. Since then, wars and revolutions in constant succession have borne out Nietzsche's prophecy, making evident what in his day was still perhaps obscure.

Nihilism, as Nietzsche conceived it, is the identification of goodness, justice, and truth with self-interest. Nihilism is the conviction that beliefs and ideas are, ultimately, a mere façade with nothing real behind them, and that consequently only one thing really matters, really counts: success. It is nihilistic to sacrifice oneself for a cause in which one does not believe, while pretending to believe in it. It is nihilistic to exalt courage and heroism independently of the cause they serve, thus equating the martyr with the hired assassin. And so on.

How did we come to this pass? The First World War is generally blamed as the cause and origin of the disaster; but would that war ever have broken out in the first place had the civilised world not already been in a state of crisis? The war merely demonstrated how fragile were the myths of progress on which capitalist civilisation was based. Even in the victorious countries, venerable institutions were subjected to such terrible ordeals that they began to totter like rotten scaffolding. And from them, scepticism and corruption spread and seeped downwards to the very foundations of society. Traditional moral and religious values, rashly invoked to prop up the vested interests which were being threatened, were thereby compromised.

The authoritarian restoration which followed the war—first in Italy and the Balkans, later in Germany and elsewhere—was a remedy worse than the disease. How could conservatives ever have deluded themselves into thinking that political tyranny of any kind would eliminate nihilism? On the contrary, fascism in all its forms meant that nihilism was installed in power. The dictatorships strengthened the old instruments of coercion and created new ones, but they did not create a new moral order; indeed, with their atmosphere of fear and servility, they aggravated

and exacerbated the general decadence. With the collapse of these régimes, the basic nihilism remained, buried deep in peoples' consciences.

And so in many ways we are back where we were, except that we are once again free to discuss the moral situation of man without having to make concessions to a false optimism, dissimulation not being a civic virtue in a democracy.

But the big difficulty is this: nihilism is not an ideology, it cannot be legislated about, it is not a subject for school curricula; it is a disease of the spirit which can be diagnosed only by those who are immune from it or have been cured of it, but to which most people are quite oblivious, since they think it corresponds to a perfectly natural mode of being. "That's how it has always been; that's how it will always be."

We are all familiar with the picture which post-Nietzschean and existentialist literature has drawn of the predicament of present-day man. It can be summarised as follows: all links between the existence and the being of man are broken; existence has no meaning beyond itself; what is human is reduced to mere vitality. Before commenting on what I consider the provisional and transient nature of this representation, I feel bound to state that in some respects I find it praiseworthy. I think sincerity is always to be admired, especially if it requires a certain amount of courage, for without sincerity neither morality nor art can exist. And moreover, at the stage to which things are now reduced, I as a writer see no other way, outside the freedom of art, of placing before the minds of men the problems which elude them, and of presenting them with a truer image of themselves than that which they see daily in the mirror. However, literature cannot take up a permanent abode in a nihilist situation, and the only way out for it, I think, is to explore courageously the entire surface of this situation. Anyone undertaking to do so with absolute intellectual honesty and an uncorrupted heart should sooner or later be able to reach its farthest limit. At that point, one of two things will happen to him: either he will find the abyss of suicide yawning at his feet, or else he will

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rediscover some valid meaning in human existence. This is no abstract hypothesis, but the plain truth of what has happened to quite a number of people.

THE examples are far from insignificant. Here I shall only mention two: the literary path of Ernst Jünger and that of Albert Camus. The German writer reached the farthest limit of nihilism in his famous message *Der Arbeiter*. In this description of a new type of proletarian, depersonalised and standardised, without heart, soul, or brain—a living robot—he depicted the protagonist of the transformation which is taking place in modern society. The greatest freedom of this human robot would consist in being mechanically employed in the series of civil and imperialist wars on which we have already embarked and which will dominate the coming centuries. “To sacrifice oneself for a faith,” wrote Ernst Jünger, “means to reach one’s maximum, irrespective of whether that faith is true or false. The mere fact that men throw themselves into the fray, even though they are knotted up with a fear that no discipline and no love of country can dispel, makes them, like martyrs, bear witness to an ultra-human reality that is beyond and within them.” The heroism of Jünger’s proletarian robots would therefore be all the more sublime the remoter it was from the traditional human sphere and the more closely it resembled that of highly perfected machines. This was a final point beyond which it was impossible to advance. Ernst Jünger retreated from it in time, while Hitler was still in power. In his subsequent works, among which may be mentioned the pages on pain, the novel *Auf den Marmorklippen*, and the diary he kept during the invasion of France in the Second World War, his condemnation of nihilism is increasingly explicit and increasingly based on human motives.

The experience of Albert Camus is different but analogous. No reader of his books can fail to discern the sharp contrast dividing *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* and *L’Etranger* on the one hand, from *La Peste* and the book of essays entitled *L’Homme Révolté* on the other. Camus opens *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* with the concept of suicide,

in order to distil from it an explanation of the meaning of life. He bluntly defines as absurd the reasons for living. “To die voluntarily,” he writes, “implies that one has recognised, at least instinctively, the absurd nature of this habit, the absence of any serious reason for living, the senselessness of this daily agitation and the futility of suffering.” To kill oneself means “simply to recognise that life is not worth the trouble.” In compassion Camus finds the cure for this desolate sense of the absurd. “The world in which I live repels me,” he wrote later, in *L’Homme Révolté*, “but I feel with its suffering inhabitants.” In his novel *La Peste* the existence of the characters is presented, not as the impassive unfolding of arbitrary and meaningless facts, but as the compassionate encounter of human beings suffering and struggling against a common destiny.

At a certain point in *La Peste* Rieux, a doctor, meets a municipal employee named Grand whose wife has just left him, with no ill-will on either side. “From a distance he looked at Grand, who was standing almost glued to a shop window full of roughly carved wooden toys. Tears were streaming down the cheeks of the old clerk. And those tears shook Rieux, because he understood them and could feel them in the dryness of his own throat. He could even remember the day when the poor fellow had got engaged to be married; he had seen him standing in front of a shop decked out for Christmas, with Jeanne bending towards him, telling him she was happy. No doubt but that Jeanne’s fresh voice was echoing now to Grand across the distant years. Rieux knew what the old, weeping man was thinking of at that moment, and he too thought that without love this world of ours is a dead world, and that there always comes a time when, weary of the prisons of work and courage, one wants the face of another human being and a heart filled with the wonder of tenderness. . . . He felt Grand’s unhappiness as his own, and something gnawed at his heart at that moment—the fierce anger that comes over one at the suffering which human beings have to endure.” Even the revolt born of pity alone can restore meaning to life.

André Malraux presents a more remarkable case because this French descendant of Nietzsche, through his progress from Communism back to nationalism, gives the impression of having remained a Nietzschean at heart all the time. The stormy curve of his life's journey does indeed seem the adventure of a "superman" seeking tests and opportunities for his own dreams of glorification. Nevertheless it would be unjust to consider it as a superficial movie-hero affair. Between *La Tentation de l'Occident* and *La Psychologie de l'Art* there is more than a change of scene. In 1926 Malraux was announcing the historical downfall of Europe, "this cemetery where only dead conquerors sleep." The Communist revolt of the coloured peoples seemed to offer him hope; but how ambiguous was his adherence to it. The virile sense of a new brotherhood of man alternated, in the pages of *La Condition Humaine*, with the intoxication of action for its own sake. In *Le Temps du Mépris*, brotherhood was invoked more wholeheartedly, as the last resort against nihilist desperation. It was an active sympathy, consecrated by the sacrifices which culminated in the act of an unknown comrade who saved Kassner, the Communist leader, from Nazi torture. But did this member act on his own initiative or by order of the party machine? And can brotherhood be founded on anything but freedom and personal responsibility? "Economic servitude is hard," old Alvear was to say in *L'Espoir*, "but if in order to destroy it we are obliged to strengthen political or military or religious or police servitude, then what does it matter to me in comparison?" Revolutions, like trees, are to be judged by their fruits, and not by the effort they cost.

I know that these are isolated examples, and that one or even two swallows do not make a summer. Still they do point to a path of salvation, a true way out of nihilism, which springs from a sure and indestructible element deep-rooted in man.

But to return to my point. The particular spiritual condition I wish to discuss has affinities with the instances I have just mentioned. However, it follows a different path and has a

significance of its own. For example, it never starts from philosophical or scientific conviction, but almost always from simple instinctive revolt against family or social surroundings. One fine Sunday some of us stopped going to Mass, not because Catholic dogma seemed to us, all of a sudden, false, but because the people who went began to bore us and we were drawn to the company of those who stayed away. A young man's revolt against tradition is a frequent occurrence in every age and every country, and his reasons are not always clear to the onlooker. According to circumstances, it can lead to the Foreign Legion, to common crime, to a film career, to a monastery, or to political extremism. What characterised our revolt was the choice of comrades. Outside the social organisation of which the Church was so important a part, there were the landless peasants. A choice once made, the rest, as experience shows, follows automatically. Without the slightest attempt at resistance, indeed with the well-known fervour of neophytes, one accepts the language, symbols, organisation, discipline, tactics, programme and doctrine of the party to which one's new comrades belong. It is hardly surprising that rarely should anything learnt in the catechism and schoolbooks hinder one's docile acceptance of the new orthodoxy. Indeed, one does not even feel the need of refuting them, because all of that has become part of the world one has left behind. They are neither true nor false: they are "bourgeois," dead leaves. The choice is emotional, beyond logic. And the claim of the new orthodoxy, which one has accepted so completely, to be scientific and objective—that is not the least of the inconsistencies which you will vainly seek to force on the attention of the convert.

This is the rule. I have read a certain number of biographies of anarchists, socialists, communists and fascists, and I am more or less familiar with the circumstances that led some of my acquaintances into political activity; so far I have found no exceptions to the pattern I have just described, and if any do exist, I think they are rare. We proclaim ourselves revolutionaries or conservatives for motives, often ill-defined, that are deep within us, and

before choosing we are, unknown to ourselves, chosen. As for the new ideology, we learn that, usually, at the schools of the party to which we have already pledged allegiance by an act of faith. Altogether similar—and just as it should be—is the opposite process of abjurement. Ideology is now given the same rough treatment once meted out to the catechism and to patriotic stories. To speak in old-fashioned terms, the head, even in the process of re-learning, is towed along by the heart—or, according to the health of the person in question, by the stomach.

THERE is one duty, however, that we cannot evade: to be aware of what is happening. What could the landless peasants of his Southern Italian village have meant to a young student, in the years immediately preceding the First World War, that he should embrace their cause? He was certainly not thinking of politics as a career. Besides, he as yet knew nothing of the proud Marxist prophecy acclaiming the proletariat as the legitimate heir of modern philosophy. Neither did he know that, after the Milanese revolution of 1848, Carlo Cattaneo had declared the cause of the proletariat to be indissolubly linked thenceforth with that of freedom, one destined to travel through the coming ages with the other, like horseman and rider. He had as yet heard nothing of Rosa Luxemburg's theory of the natural impulse to revolution of the working class, or of Lenin's theory of the forces which propel modern society on the path of progress. Nor did he know of Sorel or other prophets of the new Messiah. But if the new revolutionary theories of the historical mission of the proletariat had not yet reached that remote district of Southern Italy, emigrants returned from America were already prompting the landless peasants to form their first resistance leagues. It is not to be wondered at that a young man already secretly disgusted with his surroundings, witnessing this unaccustomed ferment, should undergo a profound change of heart and become convinced that in an old, tired, decrepit, blasé society such as the one in which he lived, the poor represented the final refuge of life—something

real, to which it would be wholesome to attach oneself.

Those were the declining years of an epoch in which a number of events had seemed to prove the myth about the liberating mission of the proletariat. The fascination of that myth spread far beyond the narrow limits of party politics. It was the great popular alternative to the nihilist decadence of Nietzsche's prophecy—the promise of a new earth and a new heaven. Morals, art, philosophy were all directly influenced by it. And events seemed to indicate that Rosa Luxemburg was right. In those years one did not yet risk contradiction if one claimed that wherever a workers' organisation was active, under whatever régime, in whatever climate or social conditions, despite its shortcomings it would move "naturally" towards freedom and renewal. Indeed, a certain episode occurred around 1905 in Moscow which has remained a classic in the history of the workers' movement and seemed to have been created for the express purpose of proving even to sceptics how well founded was the theory of Rosa Luxemburg about the liberating impulse of the working class. The Tsarist secret police, the Okrana, decided to encourage the formation of a labour union in the hope of drawing underground agitators into it and arresting them. These, however, scented a trap and kept clear of it; but the labour union, despite its police origin, became of its own accord a revolutionary organisation, so that the Okrana was soon obliged to disband it.

Since then, as we all know, the myth of the liberating power of the proletariat has dissolved along with that other myth of the inevitability of progress. The recent examples of the Nazi labour unions, those of Salazar and Peron and, in a broader sense, all reformist and cooperative unions, have at last convinced of this even those who were reluctant to admit it on the sole grounds of the totalitarian degeneration of Communism. Now, however, the decline of that myth must be obvious to anyone who takes the trouble to inform himself of the conditions prevailing in the world beyond his own backyard. It is no longer merely a question of a few privileged

workers (the so-called "proletarian aristocracy" of the imperialist countries, made possible by the exploitation of colonial peoples); nor of the inferior groups on the margin of the productive process (the so-called *Lumpenproletariat*); but of the normal working classes. For Marxists the moral to be drawn is clear: a similar way of living no longer determines an identical or analogous way of thinking. Class consciousness is no longer a natural product of class. Ever since this situation arose, ever since there ceased to exist a world-wide trend of the working classes towards freedom, human life has acquired a new aspect, spiritually as well as politically. The workers' world is spiritually broken-up. It is multiform. The horse of Carlo Cattaneo has thrown its rider and gone wild again. The worker can work for the most conflicting causes; he can be Blackshirt or partisan, executioner or victim, or simply, in rich and peaceful countries, a lazy philistine with no ideals, insured against unemployment, old age, illness, and also against the risk that the insurance company might go bankrupt. But generally, in poor countries, because of his relative political simplicity, he can still be the prey of extremists. He can still be Christ, taking on himself the sins of others; and he can also be Barabbas, an ignoble totalitarian Barabbas, trampling on all that is most human in man. Either way, he is a protagonist on the world stage. The vital role of the workers in production, their numbers, their greater social compactness and homogeneity—the sum of these factors in every country gives them the decisive voice in politics. No other single element is so powerful. On it depends the freedom of mankind, and much else. But since it is no longer class that decides, but conscience, we are back where we started.

ONE need only look around one to see the state to which consciences have been reduced. Nihilism has spread from the upper classes over the entire surface of the social fabric: the epidemic has not spared the working-class districts. Today the nihilist cult of force and success is universal. And the widespread sophistry of cowardice that identifies

History with the winning side—that too is nihilism. Are the dead, are the weak always in the wrong? Was Mazzini wrong? Was Trotsky wrong only because he was defeated? Were Gobetti and Matteotti wrong? And did Gramsci begin to be right only after April 1945? Will he cease to be right if the strength of his party declines? And is fear of the hydrogen bomb the fear of a stronger right, a right therefore more convincing than the others?

To the general feeling of personal insecurity which in our age has been engendered by the economic crisis and the intrusion of the state and politics into every field of human activity, there corresponds the anxious search by individuals for some kind of security and protection in one or other of the political mass parties. This by no means excludes, incidentally, a double game with the opposing party, which might be the winner tomorrow. If ideological criticisms and moral campaigns cannot shake the compactness of the mass parties, if they leave the majority of their members indifferent, it is precisely for the reason already mentioned: those joining the mass parties out of inner ideological conviction are very few. And to the opportunism of individuals obsessed with their own security and that of their families, there is added the usurping tendency of collective organisations. Frankly, I cannot think of a single collective organisation today which could be said to be untainted by the leprosy of nihilism. Group living, it would almost seem, creates the most favourable temperature for the incubation of its germs. The deathly mechanism is always the same: every group or institution arises in defence of an ideal, with which it rapidly comes to identify itself and for which it finally substitutes itself altogether, proclaiming its own interests as the supreme value. "Whoever injures the Party is against History." The members of the group in question are unruffled by this procedure; in fact, they find it serves their purposes. The advantages are by no means negligible, because they are completely absolved from all personal responsibility. In the deplorable event of someone having a scruple, all he need do is bring his problem to the propaganda office. If the

matter is delicate, the answer will be delivered to him at home. Few people realise that the tyranny of means over ends is the death of even the noblest ends. And it is a mere mystification to claim that the reduction of human beings to the status of instruments and raw materials can ever ensure human happiness.

There is no more melancholy image than that of the persecuted who in their turn become persecutors. Here I should like to recall the letter which Simone Weil wrote to Georges Bernanos in the spring of 1938 about the Spanish Civil War. The Catholic-Royalist writer's vehement indictment of the excesses of the Franco repression in Majorca is countered by the anguished confession of the young revolutionary intellectual, then a volunteer on the Republican side. The letter has been published only recently. It expresses a sensitive woman's horror at the useless massacres which accompanied these events. But she had witnessed something else that had made an even more painful impression on her than brute violence. A purer-hearted witness or a more exemplary circumstance would be hard to find.

"I have never seen," she writes, "either among the Spaniards or among the French who have come here to fight or to amuse themselves (the latter often being gloomy, harmless intellectuals) anyone who expressed, even in private conversation, repugnance or disgust for, or even only disapproval of, unnecessary bloodshed. You talk of fear. Yes, fear has played a part in these killings; but where I was I did not find that it played as large a part as you ascribe to it. Men to all appearances courageous, when dining with friends, would relate with a warm, comradely smile how they had killed priests or 'fascists'—a word of elastic meaning. I felt that whenever a certain group of human beings is relegated, by some temporal or spiritual authority, beyond the pale of those whose life has a price, then one finds it perfectly natural to kill such people. When one knows one can kill without risk or punishment or blame, one kills; or at least one smiles encouragingly at those who kill. If at first one happens to feel some revulsion, one hides it, stifles it, fearing to seem lacking in virility. There seems to be in this some im-

pulse or intoxication which it is impossible to resist without a strength of mind which I am obliged to consider exceptional, since I have not found it in anyone. On the contrary, I have seen sober Frenchmen whom I had not previously despised—men who of their own accord would never have thought of killing anyone—plunging with obvious relish into that blood-soaked atmosphere. The very aim of the struggle is blotted out by an atmosphere of this kind. Because the aim can be formulated only in terms of the public good, the good of human beings; and human beings have no value." And the letter ends: "One sets out as a volunteer, with ideas of sacrifice, only to find oneself in a war of mercenaries, with a great deal of unnecessary cruelty thrown in."

Of course there will be people foolish enough to dismiss Simone Weil's letter as defeatist; but the defeat had preceded it, as an illness precedes its diagnosis. In this worldwide moral shipwreck, what scrap of driftwood can one clutch in order not to drown? Among the reflections of Simone Weil collected under the title *La Pesanteur et la Grâce*, we find this indirect answer, the validity of which goes far beyond politics: one must, she says, "always be ready to change sides with justice, that fugitive from the winning camp."

WE HAVE come a long way now from the very simple situation in which some of us revolted against our family surroundings and went over to the side of the proletariat. The proletariat of this world are no longer in agreement among themselves; they are no longer the incarnation of a myth, and if one were to follow them blindly and unconditionally one might find oneself where least one wants to be. The initial choice must now be followed by another. To judge men, it is no longer enough to see if they have calloused hands; one must look into their eyes. There is no mistaking the look of Cain. Do we side with the inmates of the slave labour camps or with their gaolers? This dilemma we can no longer evade, because the executioners themselves are forcing it on us. Threateningly they demand: "Are you with us or against us?" We must call a spade a spade. We are certainly

not going to sacrifice the poor to the cause of freedom, nor freedom to the poor, or rather to the usurping bureaucrats who have climbed on the shoulders of the poor. It is a matter of personal honour to keep faith with those who are being persecuted for their love of freedom and justice. This keeping faith is a better rule than any abstract programme or formula. In this age of ours, it is the real touchstone.

It should be apparent from the foregoing why humanism in general, literary or philosophical, means very little to us. Perhaps the time for it will come again, but at present we feel very remote from the serenity and harmony it represents. To us it seems that the self-complacency of man implicit in humanism has scant foundation nowadays. Mankind today is in poor shape. Any portrait of modern man, if at all faithful to the original, cannot but be deformed, split, fragmentary—in a word, tragic.

Our problems are limited in range. We are neither believers nor atheists, nor are we sceptics. When the premisses of metaphysics and even of history are uncertain and open to question, the moral sense is forced to extend its scope, taking on the additional function of guide to knowledge. There is a concreteness in it, moreover, which saves us from abstract moralism. The moral sense never operates in a vacuum: for our part, the emotional charge which impelled us to our initial choice has not been exhausted by disillusion. And many of those who belong today to no church and no political party are in a similar spiritual condition.

What is left in the end? There are, it seems to me, a few Christian certainties so deeply immured in human existence as to be identified with it. Anyhow I do not think I have the right to speak of faith, but only of a certain trust. This trust is founded and turns on something more than the compassion of Albert Camus. It is founded on the inner certainty

that we are free and responsible, and it turns on the absolute need of finding a way towards the inmost reality of other people. This possibility of spiritual communion is surely the irrefutable proof of human brotherhood. Love of the poor is born (or reborn) from it, as an obvious corollary the truth of which no disillusion, since it is not a love based on self-interest, can place in doubt. How can one resign oneself to the thought that in so many human creatures born to poverty and wretchedness, man's noblest faculties are stifled? To live one's life, ignoring the fundamental obligation which this implies, is no longer, it seems to me, morally conceivable. This is not to be interpreted, however, in political terms of power or tyranny. To use the poor as a stepping-stone to power, and then to betray them, is undoubtedly the most wicked of all sacrileges, because of all human beings they are the most defenceless. Nor can this suffice as an indication of how to solve every problem. Humbly we must confess that we have no panacea. All we have—and it is a great deal—is this trust that makes it possible for us to go on living. The sky above us is dark, and this small circle of light barely enables us to see where to place our feet for the next step.

This amounts to saying that the spiritual situation I have just described admits neither of defence nor of arrogance. Frankly, it is merely an expedient. It resembles a refugee encampment in no-man's-land, an exposed makeshift encampment. What do you think refugees do from morning to night? They spend most of their time telling one another the story of their lives. The stories are anything but amusing, but they tell them to one another, really, in an effort to make themselves understood.

As long as there remains a determination to understand and to share one's understanding with others, perhaps we need not altogether despair.

Peter Wiles

In Defence of “Big Business”

IS large-scale business more or less efficient than small? The question has very many interesting ramifications. Our answer to it can affect our attitude to trade union organisation, diocesan and parish boundaries, local government, Scottish nationalism, European Union, comprehensive schools, and the future of Icelandic literature. In being thus important to non-economists, it is not alone among economic questions, but it is perhaps distinguished by its essential simplicity and the ease of non-technical presentation. I shall begin by defining my terms and describing previous answers to the question, proceed to give my own, and conclude by drawing a few non-economical consequences.

Efficiency is best defined, not as the quantity of production per man, but as the average cost, including all overheads, of an article produced. Production per man obviously neglects machines (why not take production per machine?), interest, raw material wastage, etc. Clearly, the best measure is one that takes account of all possible “inputs,” and this is the cost in money. It has certain disadvantages, but in a large number of observations these may be dismissed as random errors not affecting the result; and incidentally productivity figures show the same result anyway. Secondly, everyone knows that very small businesses are inefficient (and observation confirms this); what we really want to know is how medium and large businesses compare. Lastly, we suspend for the moment all judgement as to whether it is size that causes efficiency or efficiency, size. We must first obtain a simple correlation; causal analysis follows.

NINETEENTH-CENTURY economists held that large firms are more efficient than medium. It was not, however, this that interested them. Marx saw that very small businessmen—peasants, shopkeepers, and artisans—formed a different social class from the rest and were being ground out of existence by them. This was the Law of Capitalist Concentration, whereby the lower-middle-class entrepreneur, is beaten by the competition of the modern mechanised capitalist and sinks—Marx hoped—to a desperate and embittered proletariat, property-less state. As far as this directly concerns our question, it is right enough, though Marx’s views cannot decently be mentioned even in passing without pointing out his one gross error in this field: he forgot that modern capitalism needs a salaried lower-middle-class so big that, if we add it to the vigorous and still numerous remnants of his own entrepreneurial lower-middle-class, we find that the whole group actually expands; the net effect of capitalism, then, is in the long run to deproletarianise. Be that as it may, Marx, being interested only in social classes, seldom bothered his head with the relation of one capitalist to another. He did not analyse competition and monopoly among his capitalists, but if pressed he would undoubtedly have said that the larger the firm the more efficient, so that each trade ends in a monopoly. Left-wing economists have never shied away from this conclusion, which is welcome to them (unless they are anarchists) on every ground.

The more orthodox Marshall held the same view. If efficient entrepreneurs were immortal,

he said, they would drive out all competitors and monopolise their line of business. Thus he not only believed that efficiency increased indefinitely with size, but also implied a view as to cause and effect; efficiency was cause and size effect. Actually, however, entrepreneurs, like Socrates in the syllogism, are mortal. There is no reason why their successors should also be exceptionally efficient, so monopoly does not often occur. Thus did Marshall save competition, which all right-wing economists have liked to do.

This analysis too has a flaw, and one much more germane to the issue than Marx's. First, if size were the cause of efficiency, and if, furthermore, ever greater size led to ever greater efficiency, even a mediocre entrepreneur, inheriting a business already large, could achieve with this initial advantage a monopoly. This possibility must be excluded before human mortality is accepted as a bar to monopoly. Secondly, a limited company is in any case not mortal. It recruits at least most of its managers by ability not inheritance, so that if it happens for any reason to be in a position to pay high salaries it can recruit ability, and become more efficient, and pay higher salaries, and recruit more ability. . . . Forgetting the managerial revolution, Marx mistook the class-structure and ownership-distribution of developed capitalism, and this was for his purposes a fatal error. For our more modest purposes, however, Marshall made the greater error, since the absence of a managerial revolution is essential to his argument about large and small business.

ORTHODOX 20th century economists have mostly found Marshall's admission—that competition would at any rate disappear if efficient entrepreneurs were immortal—too much for them. They have dropped the notion that efficient management causes indefinite growth at the expense of competitors, and have substituted a causal effect of size on efficiency. This, as we shall see, is in any case rather arbitrary, since causation is here clearly reciprocal. But more than that, they have postulated certain "dis-economies" of large-

scale operation which ensure that a firm has an optimum size, growth beyond which again reduces its efficiency.

Now modern economists have not based their case on observation but on *a priori* speculations. Of these two are outstanding. One is the purely deductive "law of diminishing returns." This states that if one factor of production, say labour or machinery, is added in ever greater numbers to a fixed quantity of another, say machinery or labour, the fixed factor becomes a bottleneck. It is possible, doubtless, to squeeze more output through this bottleneck, but only at an ever increasing cost in the factor that is varied. Hence costs, even of both factors taken together, *must* eventually rise. And this conclusion can in fact be rigorously deduced from the premises in a manner to satisfy any analytic philosopher. Unfortunately, however, the premises are irrelevant to our purpose, for in the long run no factors of production are fixed in quantity.

The second "proof" that large firms are less efficient than medium appears to be more factual but is actually only a special case of the first. It is that it is much more difficult to manage a large firm and that *therefore* medium size is best. Now large-scale management is indeed more difficult, but the conclusion is an obvious *non sequitur*: the difficulty might be merely the obverse of certain offsetting advantages. Alternatively, the management can be said to be a fixed factor upon which the above "law of diminishing returns" operates. But then one must consider the possibilities of mechanising the routine operations of management and of decentralising the power of major decision. In other words, there is no good reason why management should be a fixed factor within the meaning of the act, and a verdict of non-proven must be brought in again.

FACTUAL comparisons of large, medium, and small firms are surprisingly numerous. I have found it possible to collect, simply from censuses of wholesale trades (U.S. Tariff Commission reports, sundry British white papers, etc.), three hundred and thirty-three such comparisons. The order of efficiency in these

comparisons is: large, medium small, 76 per cent; medium, large, small, 15 per cent; other, 9 per cent. Mostly, however, there is little difference between medium and large firms. The advantage of large over medium is never so great as that of either over small.

It is instructive to give an example of the extreme dishonesty with which these figures, when not neglected, are sometimes treated. The Temporary National Economic Committee on the Concentration of Economic Power (a sort of Royal Commission set up by the U.S. Senate before the war) sets out the costs and sizes of firms in certain industries. As might be expected, life and statistics being what they are, there is no smooth progression in efficiency from the smallest individual firm to the largest. Here a small firm is lucky or well-managed, there a large firm unlucky or ill-managed. If the data are grouped into, say, five or six size-classes, they mostly fall into the 76 per cent set out above (and have in fact been included there). But if we concentrate on the largest firm of all, we seldom find it to be the most efficient of all. And this only-to-be-expected phenomenon, due solely to the random fluctuations thrown up by all statistics, is taken by the Commission as general proof that medium, large, small is the normal order of efficiency!

There is thus no question as to facts: large rather better than medium, medium much better than small. Of causes, it is possible to speculate very plausibly. First, where there is unrestricted competition—and that is not often—an efficient firm will drive out the inefficient, provided it wants to. Now businessmen are not all aggressive and indeed many (let us not guess how many) tend to stop working and worrying when their personal livelihood is assured. Nevertheless if the market contracts the inefficient will go to the wall, and that leaves only the efficient to grow and fill the market willy-nilly when it expands again. Also *some* businessmen are aggressive as well as efficient, and these will expand even in a stable market. Therefore efficiency often causes large size.

Secondly the facts clearly show that large size *need* not cause inefficiency. If there is any

such tendency it is in fact successfully combated by the average large firm, though perhaps only because it has hired the very best managers (that being why it grew to be big). Personally I would go much further. When engineers make estimates of what a larger plant could do, given the market, it always turns out to be cheaper than production on the present scale. There are always specialised machines and methods which could save costs, but only if operated in the very largest scale. True, there are inventions—rotavators, electric power—which make things easier for small firms: but nobody said electric power made life *more difficult* for big ones, or that it was a handicap to have a holding so large you could *choose between* a rotavator and a proper tractor. I am therefore convinced that large size is *one* of the causes of efficiency, though evidently after some point of growth it has relatively little further effect. It must also be borne in mind that both size and efficiency might be the effects of some third cause: say the age and experience of the firm.

Now why have right-wing economists been so negligent, even dishonest, about this question? Obviously because they are liberals of the old-fashioned kind: the sort of man who in Britain has long hesitated before deserting the Liberal for the Conservative Party but has mostly done so by now; the sort that on the Continent fits very well into the Free German Party or the Belgian Liberal Party. This sort of liberalism—so strongly revived now in Europe—is mainly economic, not political. It shares with Marxism, indeed with most 19th century philosophies, the false thesis that the economic structure of society determines the political: "you cannot have controls without a political police." Such are the unspoken assumptions—now very greatly attenuated—of the orthodox Anglo-Saxon and Continental economic tradition. With very many scientific achievements to its credit—indeed it monopolises almost all the genuine achievements of economics—this tradition retains nevertheless its bias. The consumer must be sovereign, competition is good, private monopoly and state intervention are bad. If competition is

not to yield to monopoly, medium firms ought to be more efficient than large. Therefore they are. Moreover upon consumer's sovereignty and competition rest, in some unexplained or half-explained way, not only economic growth and material prosperity, but also parliamentary democracy and the rule of law.

It seems to me that two of these four desiderata rest on nothing of the sort. Economic growth and material prosperity obviously depend upon efficiency, which means, whichever way the causation runs, that firms ought to be large (for either the efficient must drive out the rest, which means they must grow in size; or to be efficient at all they must first be big; or both). But what of the large profits, it may be asked, that monopolies make by restricting output? What of the way they mistreat the consumer and the potential competitor? Even admitting they produce more cheaply, do they produce the right things, or indeed enough of anything?

These are purely economic questions of little interest here. Enough to point out that the salaried manager of a public or *private* monopoly is quite unlikely to behave like a Victorian entrepreneur who has made a million. Rockefeller and Gould, or our own Hudson, were uneducated self-made men. The modern economic analysis of monopoly behaviour rests on the sociological error that a Wykehamist, the son of an Anglo-Indian civil servant, who gets a second in PPE at my College and goes into ICI as a management trainee, could become a Rockefeller. Free secondary education, heavy taxes, and the managerial revolution have rendered that type obsolescent.

Furthermore of all corporate profits at least two-thirds now go to the Inland Revenue (which must be accounted here a good use of profit), and of the rest about three-quarters go to re-equipment (which is certainly a good use). So even if monopolies really do earn excessive profits, it does not matter.

HOWEVER if material prosperity requires one set-up, perhaps liberty and human individuality require another. We have no reason

to suppose that what makes us rich also keeps us free. An economy consisting of small firms cannot be controlled from one centre; there will be low taxation and little price control, or evasion and black markets. And this is in itself a contribution of some sort to political freedom. But how much of a contribution? When the Holy Office was chasing Jews and Protestants in Spain so hard that the most Catholic of bishops might be condemned for heresy if he spoke out of turn, Spanish industry was not beyond the craft stage and in many regions the Spanish soil was farmed by peasants. It is not recorded of the Tsar's Okhrana that it had less difficulty controlling thought in the Putilov works than in the peasant countryside. Venice was a town of small merchants, and so was Florence. Yet freedom never raised its head in the one, and only intermittently in the other. Instances could be multiplied indefinitely. There really is here a "lesson of history": only those dictatorships that aspire to control the economy find large firms convenient; those that content themselves with the control of thought, speech, and the press find a peasant or artisan economy no hindrance.

Perhaps, then, if totalitarianism can exist without economic regimentation, at least the reverse is not true? An economy of large firms, public or private, offers less resistance to schemes of government control, the argument would run—nay, it positively requires them, for private monopolies should not be left alone. But the sort of government that has such schemes is totalitarian in other matters too—like the Bolsheviks. Or the Swedish Social Democrats?—history does not record a government that, intending merely to control the economy, wound up by controlling thought as well. Many governments have, of course, set out to control both; and a few, totalitarian by intention only in politics, have found themselves forced also to control the economy: for instance the Jacobins. But no Social Democratic government has ever suppressed free speech.

The lesson of experience on this point is very clear and very consoling. Professor Hayek originated the phrase, "the Road to Serfdom," to describe the progressive totalitarianisation of

a whole *society* by a government that only wanted at first to control the *economy*, but finds more and more human obstacles to this aim. No government has ever behaved like this. A democratic socialist government, faced with the alternatives, dictatorship or de-control, might conceivably wish to choose dictatorship, though even this is doubtful. But it could hardly do so, for a democratic government is *ex hypothesi* one that has not yet abolished democracy. The "human obstacles," resenting the controls, will normally take the obvious step against the threat of their retention through a superadded dictatorship: vote for the opposition. So the government's choice is not dictatorship or de-control, but to lose the elections or to de-control. Every single left-wing democratic government in post-war Europe has faced this choice, vacillated, and plunged for one or other disagreeable alternative. Not one has made the faintest attempt at a dictatorship. Naturally if democracy is not firmly rooted in the first place, there may be a different upshot. But then, so there would be whatever the complexion of the government, as the many capitalist dictatorships of Latin America demonstrate. There is, then, no traffic down the Road to Serfdom.

So it is simply not true that price controls, etc., destroy political freedom; rather does political freedom, if not abolished first, invariably destroy price controls. But if economic controls are no threat to political freedom, neither are the large firms that facilitate such controls. Again we have seen that private monopolies do not need quite that strict control once recommended; nor, of course, are anything like all large firms monopolies.

OR is it that the large firms will not so much be the tool of despotism as themselves take over the government? This, the view of Marxists and trust-busters, seems to rest on the same outdated 19th century sociology. It would be ludicrous to suppose that the British government, dominated by trade unions and party caucuses, had anything to fear from the influence of its industrial giants, even the nationalised ones. Nor, in all seriousness, would I regret it if it were so; for clearly the

managerial hierarchy of a modern trust consists of more reasonable and less rapacious men than either trade unionists or party activists. If improper pressure is to come from some quarter, let it come from this.

Moreover, it is false that the U.S. government has much to fear from its large trusts. The most unscrupulous and influential lobbies, which wangle legislation most flatly against the public interest, are the various associations of small men: the American Medical Association, the National Association of Manufacturers, the several trade and farmers' associations, and—of course—the trade unions. There is room for demagogues and low-browed activists in a congress of grocers or miners; such men rise to the top. But the American automobile industry consists essentially of three firms (soon, it appears, there will be only two); you cannot rant at a meeting of three well-educated men. And since these large firms are rich, they can afford to be generous with the government. For instance it is today the pressure of small firms that keeps U.S. tariffs so high. There can be no doubt the political atmosphere would be cleaner in any country if there were fewer small firms. Those who say the German cartels financed Hitler must prove their component units would not have done so in any case.

There are then no economic and few political objections to bigness. The really well grounded complaint is psychological. Men are prouder of their work in small factories, and are happier shopping at small shops. Indeed there is much evidence that the efficiency of labour, taken by itself, is greater in small working units; this, not managerial red tape, is the chief "diseconomy of large scale," which, perhaps unfortunately, all the other advantages of bigness more than offset. Thus for one cliché shot down there remains another standing: efficiency conflicts not with liberty but with personality. And this is of course extremely general. We could get more personal attention from the social services if we handed them over to churches and trade unions, but they would cost much more. It would ease the supply of ministers of religion if many town churches and chapels were suppressed and the parishes amalgamated; but the quality of worship

would deteriorate. A large local authority can afford a good town clerk, but it loses the interest of its electorate.

But even here not all bigness is vicious. Australia has better orchestras than New Zealand. A small language provides a narrow literature: for not only do those who write in it lack contact with a sufficient variety of models, but those who read in it make up a market too small to buy every kind of speciality. *Ceteris paribus*, again, the citizens of small nations are frankly less interesting than those of large ones. Compare Frenchmen and Belgians, Spaniards and Portuguese, even Germans and Swiss. Between the petty pressures of Main Street and the anonymity of Megalopolis there is also little to choose.

COMPROMISES, therefore, of every kind are required, so that we may both have our cake and eat it. And these compromises should by no means be afraid of bigness. To revert to economic bigness, nationalisation is of course not one of these compromises. Logically it is entirely irrelevant to the question of scale, though most nationalisers have in fact a compulsive tendency to large scale. A public business of any size is like a private business of that size, and the distinction of size is more interesting and important than that of ownership.

Cooperation is an obvious way out, in agriculture at least. The farmer retains his formal independence and continues to perform on his own those operations that yield no economies of scale. The rest he devolves on to a central body of which he is a shareholder and governor. Thus where his own working morale is the most important element in production—e.g. care of livestock—he is personally in charge; and where mechanisation matters most—e.g. bacon curing—his factory takes over. But cooperation must not be confused with trade associations and cartels—those combinations of the weak, not to cure their own inefficiency, but to protect it against the desirable ravages of the strong. Nor does the

existence of a good cooperative bacon factory exempt the farmer from the charge that he is personally inefficient, or that his holding is too small, or that its boundaries need altering. And all this applies with much greater force to factories and shops where the personal processes like livestock care are so much fewer, and those that benefit from mechanisation so much commoner. Here indeed we must question whether an industrial structure brought about by chance, inheritance and trade associations, being so inefficient economically, is quite generally speaking desirable at all. The possible economies here are, I suggest, so great as altogether to outweigh the depersonalisation that follows reform.

Two more consolations at least. Bigness is of course useless where the market is small. But in villages the market is highly local. A small seedy village grocer is more efficient *for the limited task he must perform* than a supermarket, whether in the village, where it would go bankrupt, or in the town, where it is too far away. There will always be a need for immensely many small businesses of this kind. Again, as we have seen, medium-sized businesses, though not actually more efficient, can often compete very well with large ones.

Secondly, high morale and personal pride are at least barely possible in large firms. Bata, for instance, successfully combined technical centralisation with psychological devotion: each minutely subdivided process through which his shoes passed was made a separate accounting unit, and to it the comparatively few workers on the process felt they belonged. Many other firms have tried co-ownership with success. One must be sceptical of all these devices: they have been recommended for decades, so if there is no catch in them why are they not more widespread? But at least they show that the full depersonalising force of large scale manufacturing can be mitigated. By reasonable social experiments, industrial man can make tolerable to his feelings that efficiency to which his appetites have condemned him.

The Cartouche

THE clatter of the mowing-machine from beyond the laurel hedge had ceased. An almost complete silence had fallen, the silence of the ended. Every daisy that during the previous week had ventured to lift its eager face to the sun, every skulking or audacious dandelion had been swiftly beheaded. For lawns are lawns. They are intended to follow the even tenor of man's way and not to indulge in the wild. The only sound that now interrupted the minute and steady click of Mrs. Millington's needle was the slightly rasping lament of a greenfinch, or the *whsst* of a swallow's wing, hawking low, stealthy as destiny, through the air of approaching evening.

Mrs. Millington's dark pretty head was stooping lower than appeared to be necessary over her sewing as she sat by the wide-open dark-framed window. The light cast up by the frilled linen pillow-case which she was mending paled the green reflected on cheek and brow from the sunlit leaves of the garden beyond and the intertwined bush of honeysuckle now languidly sweetening the sultry air.

The sun would soon be setting—as it had set the evening before; and the evening before that. The sun of all her yesterdays indeed. But with how many different kinds of adieu!—cloudless, ardent, of fair promise; indifferent, cold, obscure. Soon would come twilight, then deepening dusk, then night. And at night, although her heart then became more restless with longing, with hope reiteratedly deferred and with an ever encroaching despair, her mind and her thoughts were more closely her own.

Even now her eyes appeared to be intent on something a good deal further away than her needle. She had begun to think again; to feed upon memory. Then suddenly and not for the first time in these last few months, she had realised that thought itself *might* conceivably become audible. As if to make sure that this was not so, she glanced up stealthily into and across the room she was sharing—her husband's bookroom.

Two quite different tastes, two natures and ages and upbringing were revealed in its furniture, its colours, its very ornaments. The senseless-looking clock of black marble on the mantelpiece—whose hands never failed to circle unflinchingly over its face and to tell what the exact time was in its own small share of normal human affairs—had been a gift to her husband from an old bachelor and long-gone friend of his—a Dr.

Briggs. No less clearly the worn leather arm-chair in which he was now sitting, the lean knuckly fingers of his two large hands extending to the extremities of its two stuffed arms, had not been of her choosing. It was as masculine and durable as the benches in a railway waiting-room. The embroidered cushion which, on sitting down, he had carefully placed on the floor was feminine enough; not so the lamp-shade beside his chair, which was merely something to keep the light out of his eyes, or the blotter on the leather-covered writing-table, scattered untidily with books and papers. One hankers after one's own order of comfort in advancing age, and it becomes something of a virtue as well as a convenience to be domesticated. The foot-flattened-out green and red Turkey carpet was also as clearly an heirloom as was the portrait of Mrs. Millington's mother-in-law on the wall, whose painted eyes, it seemed, were now inhumanly surveying them both at the same time, and with some little asperity. It was a good likeness, but not a good picture; yet good enough for her son William, whatever his age, to recall her by, and perhaps to recall her candid counsel—whenever, that is, he paid any attention to it.

And now Mrs. Millington's exploring glance had settled on her husband again. Where had he been these last two days?—and last night? Why was he so silent? Why did the expression on his brooding face suggest more than mere weariness? Sheer fag and even depression? And why wasn't he hungrily and audibly munching up his bread and butter? Was there—could there be—it had become a question recurrent as cockcrow—something wrong? Would the answer to it ever be in the affirmative? Once she had feared, and yet with a faint hope and relief, that it might be so. Now she feared this outcome no less, but with scarcely the faintest gleam of hope; with a sort of caged-in despair, rather. She pushed her silver thimble a little more firmly on to her finger and began stitching again.

"Well, William?" she said. The lank, weary face, with its grey eyes and long nose, turned slowly a fraction of an inch in her direction.

"Yes, my dear?" he replied. "Oh! . . . I was only thinking."

The non-committal smile that had died out over his face as he peered round at her might have been intended for a child; for, say, their small boy, Harold. But Harold, just now miles away at his prep school, was fielding rather indolently at Long Stop.

"You are very silent. Even although you have only just come back. Can't you think and talk and munch and drink your tea at the same time? It isn't, you know, exactly the kind of absence which makes the heart grow fonder!" And as she listened to the vacuous words, it seemed as though she had memorised them ages and ages ago; as if they were the echo of a voice from another existence.

"I'm sorry, my dear—tiresome company, I'm afraid," he mumbled, through a half-suppressed yawn. "And yet—well, as a matter of fact, you'll never guess where I *have* been. I didn't know myself, so to say, until yesterday evening. I hope you weren't—weren't in the least anxious about me?"

She stitched on.

"I try," she replied at length, "never to be anxious. About anything."

I was a little surprised, of course; and wondered at your not coming as you had arranged, and—at getting no message; but no; not—*anxious*. Why”—and once more she seemed to be vacantly listening to something learned by rote—“Why shouldn’t you have a night off, now and again? I mean——” She stopped to bite off with her small teeth a cotton-end which she now no less deliberately removed from the tip of her red tongue. “I mean, no one could say you weren’t methodical, William.”

“No? Oh, ‘methodical,’ you mean. No.” He bent forward, seized his cup, gazed at the grey-filmed brownish liquid in it, took a loud gulp, and sat back again.

“Well, I was a little afraid you might be. I was *dissuaded* from telephoning, you see. In a sort of way. And now that you have mentioned it, I can’t really see why. Anyhow, there it is.”

Mrs. Millington pondered on this a moment. “Perhaps,” she replied, “your friend thought that if you did telephone, the wandering sheep would be dissuaded from *staying*? Lady or . . . ? Don’t listen to me, William, I’m being nothing but a silly parrot. I *wasn’t* anxious; I was only the least bit surprised—and extra glad to have you safely back. But now I’m terribly inquisitive. Unless of course it is, well, something private?”

“No,” was the answer; “no marks for that, my dear. There’s nothing private between you and me. There never will be. Not from now. Nor was it a ‘she’ either. As a matter of fact, indeed, it was a ‘he.’ You look very charming in that light. I have always enjoyed seeing anybody sitting at an open window. I can remember, oh, years ago, my dear mother, and my poor Aunt Agnes—she was always sitting at her open window during those last days. . . . Perhaps a storm is coming. It’s strangely still this evening. Bless me, with that light on your face, you don’t look a single day older than when—On the contrary, this last year or so you have got positively younger, as if you had been sipping at the Fountain of Perpetual Youth. And I hope, my dear, you have. Even although that—I was reminded of it only last night again—would be nothing short of a calamity. The fact is, you should never have married me.”

He had lifted his cup again, but refrained from drinking. The click of the needle had ceased. Without moving her head, Mrs. Millington had raised her dark eyes and was gazing out almost vacantly into the garden, as if she had forgotten or had taken no interest in what her husband had said. “Never married you?” she repeated. “But why not?”

“Because, you silly, magnanimous, heaven-sent creature, I am in what matters most, perhaps, so stupid, habitual, matter of fact. You *never* were; and now as tinder I’m damper than ever.”

She breathed again, almost with a sigh. “Oh, William. Again! I know all about that. That’s a very old story. And who, pray, if it were true, is the silly? Besides, all that came back into your mind *after* you had been thinking. What about? and why? Last night?” She could see only one greying cheek and a few tufts of her husband’s grizzled hair, as he sat there lounging in his old leather-covered arm-chair. He shifted his head round again to glance at her.

"Well, you see," he began systematically, "it was like this. You will laugh at me. At Cambridge, when I got to the railway station, there was a train at a standstill *in it*. And the ticket collector told me that it was a fast one. And, for a wonder, so it proved. But the signal happened to be against us at one of the stations about half-way up. And it stopped. It woke me; I had been dozing. It was a lovely afternoon, very, very peaceful. I put my head out of the window and *there* was its name-board. Well, I thought to myself, this can't be chance. Indeed it seemed providential. I looked at my watch, realised that I should have at least two hours to spare at this end, seized my bag *and* hat *and* umbrella and got out. The train had begun to move—pretty fast—by then. Someone shouted, and the station-master all but threatened to report me. It appears that if trains, even if solely for their own convenience, stop at stations which they are not intended to stop at, no passenger is entitled to get out. It *suggests* pure Gilbert and Sullivan, but it's positively true—and no doubt desirable. But imagine if life were like that! *Never* take advantage of an unexpected opportunity! *Never* follow an impulse!"

There was an oddly hollow tone, a hint even of caution in the feminine comment that followed this not very original attack on railway by-laws. "But you may not be right. It's much more likely that it was because the train was already moving; and, as you said, pretty fast. That's dangerous at any—at any time; and I'm always warning Harold against it." She paused again. "What, William," she ventured at last, "was the name of the station? *What*, as you say, couldn't have been 'chance?'"

"Ah, there you are! You'd never guess. It was—Ebbingham! And of course I instantly thought of Louis. Had you realised, my dear, that we haven't seen or heard from him for *months*—why, not since June. Unless perhaps *you* did when I was in Warwickshire."

Mrs. Millington glanced up swiftly as if to make sure what her husband was looking at at this moment. Her hand was trembling a little; and the colour had changed in her cheek. "Ebbingham," she repeated. "You mean—you mean to tell me that you had enough enterprise, William, to get out like that, to be shouted at, and at that risk just for—just for no reason at all? I shouldn't have dreamt it. Besides, how could you possibly tell—that he would be there? And about trains. You *say* you hadn't heard. But don't you remember I told you that his sister—I dislike her so much that I can't even recall her name for the moment—Oh, yes, Mildred—that I told you we had met by chance in town, and that she had said he was going away? I am sure I told you."

"As a matter of fact," said her husband, still staring at the fan-shaped piece of paper concealing his empty grate, "I don't remember. But no doubt you *would* do so. You have forgotten this rapidly decaying memory of mine. It's getting worse and worse; I was reminded of it, too, only yesterday. Anyhow, there it is. I had been wanting to have a word with him about the examinations next month and one or two other things. It would have involved a long letter; I am tired—just a little. So why not? Nothing venture, nothing win. Anyhow, I was out of the train and in the only cab available before I had realised he might not be at home."

"Yes? . . . Was he?"

"Oh, rather; we had quite a long talk. A good talk too, within limits. He didn't even show very much surprise at seeing me, or anyhow, it wasn't noticeable. Rather the contrary even; he *might* almost have been expecting me. He seemed very well too; a bit absent perhaps. But then, he always appears to have two minds at work at the same time. Did you ever know such a zigzag talker?"

"I forgot all about the trains; tea came in, we talked on and on, long after we had finished our little business matters; and then he said something about taking pot luck; and—well, would I make a night of it. There was no way out of it—unless I preferred to face getting home in the small hours. Unfortunately, as I say, his telephone was out of order. And I couldn't very well suggest that you might be anxious. He's changed. Had you noticed that? Of course, one never could predict what he might not do next. He *seems* happy-go-lucky enough; and yet never somehow quite at his ease. A queer blend. I should think in fact he had positively practised most of his 'nexts.' All impulse one minute and the wisdom of the serpent the next. He interests me. He's thinner; but not a bit less—well, attractive, I suppose. But *you* would know best about that. I find it so difficult in some things to get the woman's point of view. There's a kind of challenging Faust-like adventurousness in his face. And I'm not perfectly sure if one can positively and finally depend upon him. One can't always be certain what he is after. I supposed for a while that he had invited me to stay on because he wanted to consult *me* about something. But that must have been a mistake. . . . But there, my dear, what a disastrous thing it would be if the power were suddenly conferred on us to share one another's thoughts—without any words, I mean."

Mrs. Millington had sat, hands in lap, motionlessly listening, her eyes still fixed on the darkening scene beyond the window, as if she were waiting for something to happen; or was in search of something inside or outside her mind—which was not there.

"I had no notion, William," she said at length, "that you dissected your—that you analysed people like that. To such an extreme. And why 'disastrous'? I can't quite see, either—if he *had* nothing to consult you about—why you should have fancied otherwise. As for sharing people's thoughts. . . ." Her voice had fallen a little flat and she failed to finish the sentence.

Her husband glanced back at her again, over his glasses. "Why, yes, though you may not know it, I share your thoughts sometimes," he assured her—almost with the shyness of a child sharing a secret. "But it's Louis I was thinking of. I can't really make him out. 'Dissect,' indeed! He's so unpredictable, elusive, keeps to cover—in spite of all that gaiety, and what they call charm. I don't mean to suggest any definite antipathy. The truth is my old wits are a bit too sluggish for him; always have been. Anyhow, it wasn't really *that* I had in mind. As I say, we had a long talk; I'm not a bad listener, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. But for that very reason perhaps I drank too much of his special whisky, so it began to languish a little towards midnight. None the less there was again that feeling of something definite coming and yet failing

to come. As when one wants to sneeze, and can't. Actually, it was my dream I was going to tell you about. In the best guest-chamber, too; and I pay my respects to Louis's or his housekeeper's taste in curtains and bed-linen. Unless he has other help."

"In the guest-room? *There*, you mean? Last night?"

"Yes, indeed; in the guest-room; a charming room, too. You don't know the house, of course—I mean its upper parts?"

She fixedly returned his absent stare.

"We have only been there two or three times, William—to luncheon."

"So it was: twice," replied her husband, after another gulp at his cold tea and even a bite of his thin bread-and-butter. "And one doesn't have luncheon in the guest-room, darling, does one?"

But to this little sally, and one so absurdly inviting an easy witticism, Mrs. Millington said nothing. Her sewing lay in her lap, both her hands were pressed down into it as if it didn't matter in the least how much tumbled and creased the delicate fabric became.

"The real point," continued her husband, "is not so much the dream, but something that followed it; a sort of confession, my dear. Have you time, the patience to listen for—well, perhaps another ten whole minutes?"

There was nothing to show that she had heard the question, except that she replied in a low, ridiculously serious voice, "Of course I can listen, if only, well—you'll go straight on. Why couldn't we have begun at the dream? Anyone would suppose——"

She broke off, rose from her chair, and sat down again. "The clouds are gathering—look! Up and up and up. There's going to be a storm. I have a headache. But here I am; I want to hear the dream—and the rest. On the other hand, William, if the thunder begins . . . well, you see, I couldn't."

Certainly the sun had left the garden, and the gloom that now lay over it in a dead and menacing quietude and stagnation was not that of an ordinary twilight. Still, presages of storm often cheat even the weather-wise in a climate so fickle as England's; and everything might blow over.

"Well," her husband was continuing meditatively, "it was a very odd dream, odd to me at any rate; but other people's dreams are so dreadfully wearisome and always seem so pointless. I wish indeed, my dear, you hadn't a headache." His voice had become a little plaintive. "I, too, have just the rudiments of one; the same thing, thunder perhaps; but more likely Louis's whisky. Well, as I say, we talked until nearly midnight. He told me how one can avoid the effects of taking too much. His tongue darts about like a dragon-fly, never staying for more than a moment on any single subject or object. Nor does his eye. I found it a bit tiring at last. Besides, whether right or wrong, I had the impression that much of it was talking for talking's sake, that he must be in some anxiety, had perhaps something on his mind, wished perhaps that I hadn't come; though there was nothing, except, perhaps, his manner, to suggest it, and—his occasional silences. He *is* an oddity, you know, Margaret: so mercurial, and unstable perhaps. I wonder what

you yourself really think of him? Is what I say anything like your view of him too?"

Mrs. Millington was re-threading her needle, and with an obstinate cotton-end, and in the failing light. "Yes," she said at last; "I should imagine it is much the same. Aren't all temperamental people like that?—restless and impulsive. You mean, I suppose, that he is unlikely to stay fixed in any one intention, is never sure of his own mind? Is that what you mean?" But the faint voice that had put the question seemed not to be in any need of an answer. It was as if, in spite of the tense silence, she would not even be interested in any reply.

"What baffles me most of all," said her husband, "is that he has never yet been able to fix his *heart* on anything. The truth is, my dear, he ought to have found a wife somehow long ago. Perfectly easy! Not that my congratulations to her would not have been tempered with misgivings."

"What *was* the dream, William?"

"Well, as I say, I got to bed very late. A charming room, too, facing south: otherwise the moonlight couldn't have got in through the curtains. Louis has 'taste' enough to run an antique furnishing shop. And yet he lets his roof leak."

"His roof leak?"

"I'll come to that later. As you know, I am very rarely favoured with a dream and when I am, I usually fail to remember it. Nor are hieroglyphics"—he laughed softly to himself—"my strong point. Anyhow, when I awoke, it was, I suppose, about two o'clock in the morning. Suddenly and softly wide-awake—as though I had been called, as though a drowsy voice had called me. I had dreamt that I was lying face upwards on a very low bed, immured in the deep, dark, stony bowels of a pyramid, but without the least knowledge of how I had managed to get there, and convinced that there was no way out—not even by the way by which I must have come in. I was terrified, and in acute distress. In the faint, dusky light, I could see that there was a very fine sand on the floor, and a few old broken or derelict relics of objects which I couldn't distinguish—sacred furniture and images, I suppose. The place appeared to have been rifled; but there was no trace, as far as I can recall, of any sarcophagus or of any mummy, although some sort of both presumably there must once have been. Was *I* the mummy?! The sand was as fine as dust on the stony floor, and the walls were arabesqued with inscriptions—flowers, figures, serpents, and so forth. I was only vaguely aware of this, for my attention had become fixed on one small oblong lozenge-shaped hieroglyphic or cartouche.

"As you know, a cartouche usually contains the characters of some sovereign's name; Cleopatra's has two birds in it—heads to the west—as indeed hers finally was! Apart from this there was no other design I can recall on the stone ceiling over my head. Where the light was coming from I cannot say; in sleep perhaps our own eyes supply it, like a cat's. The characters in the cartouche resembled, left to right, first a crouching animal with a child's face, tiny of course, but, dream-magnified I suppose. Also very lovely. Next, there was a tree—a willow or weeping ash, something of that kind; and next to that, and partly

under it, stood what appeared to be a box or chest or tomb with a rounded top—of the shape of a sarcophagus but much smaller. There was even a sort of sullen glitter from the precious stones with which it had been set—although, as I say, this was only a representation of it.

“I realised that it had once contained the vital parts of someone, the heart, viscera, and so forth; but that now it was empty. The astonishing thing is that I knew in my dream perfectly well what all these emblems stood for and what they signified. A desperate cankering grief, for one thing—the *weeping* willow. An inward death. It was as if the past had resolved itself into this tiny esoteric pattern and that I could grasp it in an instant of time, and interpret its every single syllable as briefly. ‘The secrets of all hearts,’ my dear. But *that* was in the dream.”

Mrs. Millington had been so intent on this fantastic and muddled narrative that she had hardly stirred since her husband had begun to relate it. But although a dream, so comparatively commonplace, could hardly be the cause of her repressed excitement, it was almost as if in entreaty or reproach that she put her next question: “William, you aren’t making all this up? You aren’t playing with me? It *was* a dream?”

“I am telling you everything precisely as I recall it,” was his reply. “But listen; you must await the sequel. That is what is going to be my real little difficulty. And I shall feel all the better when it is over. All that was just the dream. What, when I *woke*, I knew, or at any rate supposed, to be the meaning of the emblems, of the complete design of the cartouche—and please don’t scoff—was just this and only this. It meant, ‘It was Here. It happened Here.’ Although I hadn’t the faintest conception *what!* It sounds ludicrous, but that was absolutely all. But although as is the way with dreams, I took it to be a sort of personal and private message or communication, it must merely have referred of course to the unhappy fate, the destiny—who knows what?—of the poor creature, the mummy that had been interred there, in its stony sepulchre. At least so one may *surmise*. Well, so much for the dream.”

The ageing face, again turned sidelong and away from her, looked fagged and colourless and depressed, as if it were still in some degree enslaved by a mere illusion; and the eyes in it were once more fixed upon the ceiling overhead, although this appeared to be completely unintentional and innocent of any design. Once more untidy tufts of grizzled hair were showing grotesquely above the darkened leather of the chair and the awkward contents of it resembled an old-fashioned tailor’s dummy partially dismembered. Not that the owner of them would have been concerned in the least at what he looked like; he preferred “taking things as they come” and had never been in the habit of paying much attention to appearances: although his memory sometimes managed this unaided.

“The fact is,” he went on “I can’t bear mysteries. Things in this world should be plain and above-board—as far, at any rate, as we humans can make them. And why a silly foolish inconsequent dream like that should leave any more impression than a child’s picture book on the waking rational mind I cannot conceive—if, that is, one’s mind is ever completely rational. No doubt these psychoanalysts could make hay, and pretty sour hay at that, of the whole thing. Whether or not,

and I don't care, it has haunted me ever since. You see, *then* I knew the meaning of it; and to know all, they say, is to forgive all. But now it's gone.

"Besides, somehow or other, this seemed to be not merely and only a dream. For without being conscious of any transition from sleeping to waking, I presently, as I say, found myself lying on my back in Louis's ornate and luxurious but most comfortable four-poster—staring up at *his* virgin plaster. The merest trickle of moonlight was edging in between the grey-blue window-curtains, causing the sort of dusky gloom that had seemed to be the illumination of my stony cell in the pyramid; yet it cast a pale narrow shaft of light clean across the ceiling. If she had not been well past the full, this couldn't of course have happened; though I don't profess to be much of a moon-expert. In fact, my dear, I claim to fall just that much short of being the 'compleat' lunatic. There was light enough at any rate to show up vaguely the actual pattern of the stain on the whitewash—the stain, I mean, made by the rain that had leaked through the roof, or through the floor-boards perhaps of an attic above me, owing to *Louis's* loose tiles. To *that* degree we are both of us lunatics!

"However that may be, there, sure enough, was the general design of the cartouche. And no doubt merely because the dreaming mind or fancy is so densely thronged with symbols which are supposed to be hints or warnings to the waking consciousness, I vaguely detected in the patterns precisely the same details as those of the dreamed-of hieroglyphics. Not only that; for some minutes together I accepted the same ridiculous interpretation: 'It was Here. *It happened Here.*' And naturally, I was pestered by exactly the same question—What?

"Well, all old beds—and Louis's also, unless, which is quite possible, it is a fake, is Elizabethan—all old beds must not only have had scores of nocturnal occupants, but must have witnessed many uneasy, wakeful, miserable, and possibly even tragic nights. Peaceful, pleasant, amorous, happy and visionary ones too. One is born, one marries, one dies; and all three usually involve a bed of some kind—from W.S.'s 'second-best' to Procrustes'. They say, you know, that what are called ghosts may be merely an outcome, impressing the imagination of the living, of tragic events that have left their indelible mark on the inanimate objects around them. Why not a bed, then? Why not?"

He had paused again, but not as if in wait for any critical comment or appreciation, since he had at once hastened on with: "I don't *want*, my dear, naturally enough, to destroy my own little romance. But truth must out. When the very neat parlour-maid came in with my tea and drew back the grey-blue curtains, I had a good long look at Louis's rain-stain in the full unflattering light of morning. Naturally. And, believe it or not, there was scarcely a vestige of the pattern I had seen in it in the small hours. It was now no more than a lozenge-shaped blur which you could, if you wished, turn either into a catafalque with mourning plumes complete, or into some bower of delight out of the *Faerie Queen*—whichever most suited your fancy."

For some minutes, Mrs. Millington had been sitting, her chin cupped in her hands, her elbows on her knees, her eyes fixed on the open

window, as if she were positively gloating on the intense stillness of the garden and its celestial canopy—like some moulting bird too far gone to chirp or stir, and peering out of the bars of its familiar cage at the vision of unattainable freedom beyond them, or even at a freedom now become impracticable, tarnished and stale. The slightly sallow cheek no longer owed any artificial green to the reflected sunlight; the dark eyes resembled motionless pools in some mountain valley on a starless night, wherein the reflections of the preceding centuries have left nothing but opacity and eclipse.

"I haven't," she said at length, "been really able to follow a good deal of that last part, William—about the ceiling and the rain-stains and the moon. After you woke up, I mean. Do you mean that what you saw in the dream was caused by a sort of distortion of the actual pattern in the ceiling? In that case, surely, you must have seen it—perhaps in the few moments before you fell asleep. And yet you say that, after all, the pattern wasn't really like that at all. It was merely a blur. Besides, no mere rain-stain, surely, could resemble so closely a child, a tree and a tomb? Can't it have been mere fancy, William, do you think—which one so often, and without any such intention, re-creates in one's memory?"

"I am sorry, my dear, for telling it all so badly. But I do mean that the rain-stain by *moonlight* resembled that. My explanation, right or wrong, is pretty much what you have suggested—that I must have seen, without definitely observing, the stain on the ceiling before going to sleep; that this caused the dream; and that it was the dream that imposed the design or pattern—at least to some extent—upon it. It was merely a mixture of states of mind, the dreaming and the half-dreaming and the awakening. When, then, as I say, Louis's elegant parlourmaid tapped at my door with my tea, and——"

As if the word itself had actually summoned her, Mrs. Millington's own parlourmaid at this moment herself opened the door and came in to take the tea-things away. Mr. Millington watched her until the door was shut again.

"What a marvellous crop of hair that girl has," he remarked. "You don't often see red hair nowadays: or, not, at any rate, that sort of golden bronze. Mark my words, you won't keep *her* for very long. . . . I wish none the less she wouldn't interrupt. But there, my dear, I musn't bore you any longer—not for more than one more minute, anyhow; as it is for *that* I have been waiting. As I was saying, the moment I awoke, I turned my head to look for my dream-cartouche, and the actual disfiguring rain-stain in the morning light no more resembled it than the face I am now turning towards you resembles what it was like, say, about thirty years ago, when you were a little girl with pigtails and aged ten. In those days I was not such a very bad-looking young man, though you might not think it now. And there's the rub."

The vigilant and constricted expression that had steadily deepened on Mrs. Millington's face during this long and wearisome recital, after lifting a little, had intensified again.

"Oh, William," she broke out, "if only you wouldn't keep straying off in what you have to tell me. What 'rub'? I don't know what you

mean. I'm dreadfully tired, dreadfully stupid, nervy, worked up. It's this heaviness in the air. Though now, it seems, the storm is not going to break after all. It's less dark. I dread thunder—am a coward, irresolute, impulsive in any crisis. And yet I wish—I wish almost anything. If only it would clear! Oh, everything!—the air! To breathe again. One's very soul. How you can have managed to keep all this out of your talk at lunch just passes my comprehension. You merely said the trains had gone wrong. Not a word about any dream. Nothing. And even now you haven't finished. *What 'rub'?*”

“For one reason, you precious, silly, troubled, patient thing, it was because everything I have been telling you concerns solely you and me. I sat as mum as a Grampus at breakfast that next morning, except to congratulate Louis on making his guests so comfortable—and an unexpected guest at that. I don't imagine that *he* would be very patient with dreams. Not at least with other people's. Not even with his own, perhaps, for very long together. He's so restless, so self-centred, so precarious. I came to the conclusion, my dear, the moment I was in my cab again, that he and I don't match. I'm sluggish oil; he's water, and unstable. Let's drop him out; and the dream too into the bargain. I believe even, as a matter of fact, that deep in your own heart, you share my prejudice . . . ?

“However, the 'rub' is this. Somehow that silly and meaningless cartouche took me back to when I was about twenty. It was in part a memory, you see; and it was concerned in part with a tree very much like my dream-tree, but not with anything in the nature of a chest or tomb—except perhaps in its general shape. This actual memory of mine of those far-away days is of a tree; twilight; autumn; a plain damp backless wooden bench. And two anguished people sitting on it.”

He rose from his chair, yawned, shuddered, and drawing up another next to his wife's, sat down beside her and laid both his long bony hands over hers and her sewing.

“I want you,” he said, “to listen very carefully to what I am going to tell you, and then to declare quite frankly if it will make the least difference to us. It cannot but alter your ideas of me, what you think of me, what you believed of me. But it's all far away, remote, boxed up in the past; it *was*—well, until yesterday—all but forgotten—put out of mind, I mean. There never yet was any real opportunity of its being forgiven; and it's not for me—not for myself—to forgive it even now.”

His wife had managed to withdraw her left hand from beneath his own, the other remained a prisoner. She was breathing so rapidly that she could hardly articulate clearly.

“I haven't the least notion,” she said, “what you are going to tell me. Whatever it is, it could not make any difference now. It is, you say, far away; and you were young; and, and human—like the rest of us. What *are* we, when all is said? Like bits of elastic, that can stretch so far, but no farther. Then we snap. Nor could it make any difference to what some day, *some* day. . . . Oh, William, please let me go now. My head is racking; I can hardly see out of my eyes. All you can mean is that this tree of your dream, of your waking and of the past, and

of those two woeful young people on the wooden seat—why, both, *as such*, must have rotted away by this time—all you can mean is that men, women, all of us, just because we are human, cannot for ever be fixed in anything, cannot remain absolutely steadfast and unchanged. The failure, the broken hopes, the futile yet lovely romanticalness are in our very natures; and we have, if we are foolish and impetuous, and give away the heart without counting the cost—we have to pay the price, whatever that may be or mean. You were going to tell me about some old love affair, weren't you? I can see her—sweeter, simpler, more impulsive, better-natured far, far than I have ever been, could be; and I suppose, circumstances, something you weren't responsible for, something perhaps you *were* responsible for—well, came in between. Perhaps you even treated her with atrocious unkindness? Well, what then? What we want, what we desire, changes, fades out, William. We cannot help ourselves—not even when we have attained it. Most of us. But the heart itself doesn't change; only its wants. And if it's that, I don't wish, I don't want you to tell me any more. I can see by your face—your hands are cold—that I have guessed right.”

She suddenly fell silent, staring at him in the faintly lightening gloom of the open window. “It's strange, isn't it? Very strange? If that hadn't happened, if you two had never parted, we ourselves would never have met? We should never even have met.”

Jibanananda Das

Spring Has Passed

At close of day the immemorial foxes
Enter, in quest of kill, the hill-side forest,
And prowling in silence in the inviolate dark,
Come upon a clearing, and suddenly behold—
The snow sleeping in moonlight.
Could their quadruped beings cry out upon the moment
As with human souls, the event of their heart,
Then would a wonder deep as pain dawn
In their minds;—so in the dark of the blood
My soul leaps up when you appear,
Suddenly, after spring^{*} has passed.

Translated by Chidananda Das Gupta

Men and Ideas

Irving Kristol: NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI

THE inscription on Machiavelli's memorial, in the church of Santa Croce in Florence, reads: *Tanto Nomini Nullum Par Elogium*—"Such a name is beyond all praise." But both memorial and inscription were erected in 1787, more than two hundred and fifty years after his death, and Machiavelli's bones do not rest beneath them. They had originally been laid in the family chapel in the same church; the chapel had then been taken over by a religious order; and it eventually fell into such decay that even its exact location was a matter for doubt. The imposing presence of the spirit, the obscurity that attends the body—these are appropriate signs of how Machiavelli stands with us: so intimate, so exasperatingly indefinite.

We have all learned from him, call him master. But what he had to teach is far from clear, and this despite the fact that his prose style is extolled by historians of Italian literature for its marvellous simplicity and limpidity, its ruthless abstinence—so rare in that language—from the pleasures of mere rhetoric. Jean Bodin, noting Machiavelli's affirmation (in the *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livy*) of a popular republic as the best form of government, and his call (in *The Prince*) for a new tyrant to liberate Italy from the "barbarians," complained that "*il ne savait à quoi se tenir*." Leibniz found him "a gordian knot," which he could not unravel and would not cut. And John Morley, at the end of the last century, was moved to cast a backward glance and exclaim: "In all the great countries all over the West, this singular shade is seen haunting men's minds, exciting, frightening, provoking, perplexing them, like some unholy necromancer,

bewildering reason and conscience by riddles and paradox."

The more closely one examines Machiavelli's posthumous career—"his real life," it has even been called—the more difficult does it become to get a precise notion of his doctrine, or even to be absolutely sure that he had anything which could be called a doctrine. The Elizabethan playwrights freely identified him with the Evil One; but his books, when first published, had the approval of the Church. The Jesuits later had him placed on the Index—but boldly plagiarised his writings. Richelieu praised his wisdom—as did the left-wing republicans during the English civil war. Napoleon admired him, and when he drew up a list of books to form his portable library the "republican" *Discourses* headed the field in political philosophy. Rousseau admired him too, and claimed the "tyrannical" *Prince* as "*le livre des républicains*." Macaulay baptised him a liberal: "... We are acquainted with few writings which exhibit so much elevation of sentiment, so pure and warm a zeal for the public good, or so just a view of the duties and rights of citizens, as those of Machiavelli"—an opinion shared, for quite different reasons, by Treitschke. Mussolini esteemed him highly—as did the founder of the Italian Communist Party, Gramsci, who ended his days in Mussolini's jails. And T. S. Eliot has gravely informed us that "such a view of life as Machiavelli's implied a state of the soul which might be called a state of innocence."

A book of seven seals, to which his contemporaries or near-contemporaries no more had the key than we do. The group of young men in the Orti Oricellari who listened to

Machiavelli read from the manuscript of his *Discourses* were so flushed with republican fervour that several of them proceeded to engage in a conspiracy against the Medici—an action from which Machiavelli most vigorously dissociated himself, and with a sincerity that cannot be questioned: if one earnestly intends a conspiracy, one does not commence with a series of public readings, and Machiavelli knew this as well as, if not better than, anyone else. The first edition of *The Prince*, five years after Machiavelli's death, had a preface by the printer in which he sought the protection of the Church from some persons who "do not know that those who instruct in the use of herbs and medicine, also instruct in poisons, in order to know how to guard against them"—an intriguingly cryptic remark which seems to indicate that *The Prince* was widely regarded as both a shameless defence of tyranny and as a kind of homeopathic medicine against the disease of tyranny. Presumably it was the first sense of the book which made it so dear to Thomas Cromwell, Henry III, Henry IV, Catherine de' Medici, and to all the apologists of the new "*raison d'état*" which developed along with the new absolute monarchies. On the other hand, when Cardinal Pole visited Florence a few years after Machiavelli's death, he encountered the rumour—supposedly based on Machiavelli's own utterances—that *The Prince* had been written with the intention of bringing ruin upon the Medici; and when, in a famous essay (1612), Trajano Boccalini had Machiavelli accused before a divine tribunal, not of being a *sceleratum satanae organum* as the Jesuits claimed, but of having been seen at night subversively inserting dogs' teeth into the mouths of sheep, he is giving expression to an interpretation that is as old as the Machiavelli legend itself.

"... For a long time now I do not say what I believe, nor believe what I say, and if I have nevertheless sometimes said the truth, I have hid it among so many lies that it is difficult to find."

So wrote Machiavelli in a letter to Francesco Guicciardini on May 17th, 1521. But this letter is, on the whole, frivolous in its temper, and it is impossible to know how seriously one should take the statement. Even when Machiavelli assures us he doesn't believe what he says, it is hard to know whether to believe him or not.

"I HAVE not sought to adorn my work with high-flown phrases or grandiose words, or with any other superficial enticements or ornaments, the way most others decorate their things; because I desire no honour for my work but such as its variety of matter and the gravity of its subject may justly deserve."

The secret of Machiavelli must be concealed somewhere in this style, which is at once incomparably forthright and impossibly ambiguous. This doubleness immediately suggests irony, but to say that the style is ironical is already a simplification, for it leads us to think that, having perceived the irony, we have consequently got the point. In fact, we can do little more than wonder whether it is his irony or our double vision. And if we conclude that the irony is there, we must go on to try to locate it exactly and estimate its direction, which soon leaves us with the sensation of merely having moved from one riddle to another.

Even where the irony seems broad and inescapable, so that we flatter ourselves on having no trouble in recognising it, we are soon plagued by second thoughts. "Frightfulness (*crudeltà*) may be said to be well used—if of evil it is permissible to speak well. . . ." That strikes us as an irony, face up. But is it really so clear? Is he asserting that *crudeltà* is not an evil at all, but is only sanctimoniously regarded as one? Or does he mean to say that it is indeed an evil, but that in the politics of princes it is accepted as good? The first irony is more obvious; but it would have to be, if he intended the second.

Or take the following, from the dedication of *The Prince*, addressed to Lorenzo de' Medici:

Nor will it, I trust, be deemed presumptuous if a man of low and obscure condition discusses and directs the government of princes; for as landscape painters go down to the plains to observe well the nature of mountains and other high places, and go up to the mountains to observe lowly things, so in order to understand the nature of the people one needs to be a prince, and to understand the nature of princes one has to be of the people.

If this be not presumption, what would presumption be? Yet we know from Machiavelli's letters how eager he was to enter the Medici's service, and how high his hopes were that the dedication would earn him some official favour.

Instances could be multiplied. Indeed, they could be multiplied so endlessly, and with such

facility, that one inevitably becomes uneasy. Ironies breed before our eyes, cancel each other out, are immediately reborn again, *ad infinitum*. Where a text is so fertile in ironies, is it not a case of artificial generation? This question finds additional justification in two quite remarkable aspects of Machiavelli's style. The first is its consistency throughout all of his writings—his private correspondence as well as his official legations, the “republican” *Discourses* as well as the “tyrannical” *Prince*, his trivial sketches as well as his solemn studies. The second is its permanence throughout all his life—there is no development: it exists fully grown when we first meet it, and remains stonily indifferent to time and circumstance thereafter. Historians and biographers of Machiavelli are fond of explaining him as “a man of his age.” In fact, all of the vicissitudes of his career—his success as diplomatist under the republic, his dismissal by the triumphant Medici, his exile from Florence, his slow and grudging return to favour of a sort—all these washed about him, foamed and bubbled, and then subsided, leaving some débris on the beaches but no observable mark on the general topography.

Irony usually exists by virtue of the *double entendre*, the saying one thing and meaning another; and if Machiavelli is an ironist in this way, then he has raised the art to such a degree as to be self-defeating, for we find it impossible to disentangle the two strands. However, it is conceivable that such an irony was not his intention, and that the ambiguities of his style arise not from any difference between what he said and what he meant, but mainly from the very effrontery with which he said what he meant.

WE TAKE it that Machiavelli was the founder of “political realism,” and echo Bacon, who was simple-minded in the fashion that only geniuses can be: “We are much beholden to Machiavel and others that wrote what men do and not what they ought to do.” Now, Machiavelli was highly intelligent and was a man of considerable experience in affairs of state; it is not, therefore, unexpected that his writings should contain many striking insights. In themselves, they would not have earned him his fame; there are as many such insights, as felicitously put, in more than a few other writers whose books are hardly known

to the public at large. (Machiavelli's contemporary, Francesco Guicciardini, was at least his match in this respect—even his superior, some would claim.) No, Machiavelli's fame was not due to his having had the bright idea of describing for the first time what men do, instead of what they ought to do. The princes and principalities of this world, in all the centuries before Machiavelli was born, had a fully competent knowledge of this distinction—one does not gain a kingdom, establish a dynasty without it. Nor were they particularly reticent about their knowledge: one has only to peruse such a book as Allan Gilbert's *Predecessors of Machiavelli* to see the extent to which “Machiavellianism” antedates Machiavelli. Statesmen were no more successful in their business for having read *The Prince* than Machiavelli was in his political career for having written it.

Furthermore, Machiavelli's treatises are not all wisdom. They are full of the most silly generalisations, simply because they are so wildly general. (E.g. “whoever pursues this method in a besieged city will find it easy to defend the place.”) He has his *idées fixes* (abjuring the use of firearms in war because the Romans did not use them), and he frequently gets so involved in his “lessons” from Roman history that he finds it impossible to draw any useful conclusion (as in Book II of *The Discourses*, where he finally ends up: “It does not matter much in what way a general behaves, provided his ability is so great that it quite makes up for how he behaves, this way or that.”) His fondness for rigid alternatives goes to such lengths that he seems almost at times to be parodying the medieval scholastics. Here is a fair summary of the argument of the *Discorso sopra la cosa di Pisa*, in which Machiavelli discovers the best way for Florence to suppress a rebellion in Pisa:

Pisa can be gained either by (i) love or (ii) force.

- (i) If by love, Pisa must either (a) voluntarily surrender or (b) be delivered over by its ruler.
- (a) Since the city is in rebellion, it will not voluntarily surrender.
- (b) Whether its ruler delivers the city to Florence depends on whether (1) he became ruler through love or (2) by force.

- (1) If by love, he will not betray his city
- (2) If by force, then he is strong enough to hold it, having been strong enough to win it.

Therefore, there remains only:

- (ii) Force.

True, this is probably a very early work by Machiavelli, and is a somewhat extreme example. But it is in no way untypical of the man. One has only to think of his hero-worship, in *The Prince*, of Cæsar Borgia, a clever thug whose political career was based on little else than his being the son of Pope Alexander VI: he is remembered today only because Machiavelli admired him so extravagantly, and because he had a genuinely extraordinary sister and such a monster for a father.

AND yet—the fact remains that there is something which the modern mind experiences as “realistic” in Machiavelli, and which it does not find in any earlier political thinker. There is a sense in which, as the Italian historian Prezzolini has observed, the precursors of Machiavelli are really his successors. That is to say, until Machiavelli came along they could not be seen as *leading up to* anything—they were merely worldly-wise men, who, like the poor, are always with us. They could not be understood (or misunderstood) as Machiavellians until after Machiavelli had demonstrated that there *could* be such a thing. What this “thing” is, one is hard put to to say. For, if Machiavelli inserted a new element into political thinking, it was one so powerful that it dissolved the previous, casually mixed ingredients and lost its identity among them. From his contemporaries we get only vague and tantalising hints of what he was up to. Jacopo Nardi referred to the *Discourses* only as “a work of a new kind, never before (so far as I know) attempted by anyone.” And Guicciardini, whom one would have thought to know everything worth knowing about the practice of politics, saw in Machiavelli an “inventor of new and unusual things”—but, though he wrote a long (and excellent) essay in criticism of Machiavelli, he never elaborated on that remark.

Searching for a clue to the meaning of Machiavelli, one returns to the original legend, born in the 16th century and dominant

until the Enlightenment, which identified him as a servant of Satan, and sometimes as the Devil himself. Of course, this legend was fostered by Catholic and Protestant propagandists for their own purposes; and very few of those who helped keep it alive ever so much as read a line by Machiavelli. Nevertheless, the very pertinacity of the legend, and the ease with which it took root and flourished, are suggestive. For the two qualities most generally associated with Satan were acuteness of intellect and presumption of spirit; which two, when conjointly operating, carried one beyond the world of good and evil to a realm where everything was permitted. And it was precisely this journey which Machiavelli accomplished: from the kingdom of good and evil to that transhuman kingdom before whose gates is inscribed Nietzsche’s motto for modern nihilism: *Alles ist erlaubt*—“all is permitted.”

The horror that Machiavelli inspired for so long, and which he even now can inspire on occasion, is the horror of the void—which presents itself, at one and the same time, as the Nothing and the Ultimately Real. It is the sensation we feel when we read one of his more notorious passages, such as the following from his *Arte della guerra*, in which he criticises Christianity for having debilitated the military instincts:

The present mode of life, thanks to the Christian religion, does not enforce the need for self-defence, as used to be done; for, of old, men defeated in war were either killed off or were left to spend their lives miserably in perpetual slavery; and, if a town was taken, it was either demolished or its inhabitants were hounded out, despoiled of their goods, and dispersed all over the world; with the result that those who were overcome in war, drank of misery to its dregs. This being so, out of sheer dread men kept up their military exercises. . . . But today this fear has to a large extent disappeared; for of the conquered but few are killed and no one is kept long in prison. . . . Even if a city has rebelled a thousand times, it is not demolished, and its people are left with their property, the greatest evil they have to fear being a tax, with the result that men are no longer keen on undergoing military training and putting up constantly with its hardships in order to escape dangers of which they have but little dread.

One is impelled to object; but, upon consideration, one finds nothing specific to object to. What he has said is not obviously incorrect; it is not even immoral; it simply deals in a

ruthlessly "objective" way with a matter of fact—and we realise that what was so shocking at first glance was nothing but his boldness in discussing, in a totally matter-of-fact way, what is usually regarded as a matter of morality. Moral imperatives, for Machiavelli, have the status of facts—as do immoral imperatives. Indeed, the distinction between the two kinds of imperatives can hardly be said to exist. He does not counsel evil, for that in itself would be a recognition of the good, and it is the very essence of Machiavelli that in politics there is neither good nor evil, of a moral kind. Politics is the exercise of the Will to Power, which deals not with moral truth but "effectual truth" (*verità effettuale*). Morality can, in certain circumstances, be such an "effectual truth," and Machiavelli is very much aware in his writings that conventional moral sanctions may be quite useful in politics. But he is also very much aware that, in different circumstances, they may not be.

SIR FREDERICK POLLACK claimed that in Machiavelli we meet, for the first time since Aristotle, "the pure passionless curiosity of the man of science." He would have done better to omit the reference to Aristotle, whose idea of "science," and perhaps even of "passionless curiosity," was worlds apart from Machiavelli's. But he had got the main point nevertheless, which is the close relation between the Machiavellian conception of politics and the modern scientific conception of reality.

Why should one not lie or murder in politics? In his *Ethics*, Aristotle gave the answer of classical political thought:

Not every action nor every passion admits of a mean; for some have names that already imply badness, e.g., shamelessness, envy, and in the case of actions, adultery, theft, murder; for all these and such-like things imply by their names that they are themselves bad, and not the excess or deficiencies of them. It is not possible, then, ever to be right with regard to them; one must always be wrong.

Now, there is a metaphysic behind this, which few take seriously today, and which the very successes of modern science make it almost impossible to take seriously. In its political bearings, this metaphysic assumed that man is a "political animal" in the sense that, possessed of certain natural motions of the soul that urge him to the good, he finds this good is only

realisable when the individual is a member of a body politic. This body is like the human beings that comprise it in that it has a "spiritual" reason for existence, and does not aim merely at the longest possible life.

This point of view, in an infinite variety of shadings and with an equal variety of emphases, was basic to all Western political thought before Machiavelli came along to announce: "It is a sound maxim that reprehensible actions may be justified by their effects." Today, we frequently say the same thing, but not in exactly the same way—we would certainly avoid the term "reprehensible," as having no place in that sentence. If actions are to be judged by effects, as causes are judged by consequences, it is nonsensical to say that reprehensible actions are to be justified by their effects, for if they are so justified they are not "reprehensible." What often seems like irony in Machiavelli, or a desire to shock the reader, is nothing more than his effort to state the principles of politics as an objective science in a language that was still permeated by the assumption that politics could *not* be an objective science, since it was already a branch of ethics; and ethics could not in the very nature of the case be "objective," since its concern was with the good or bad intentions of the subject. And what often seems like ambiguity in Machiavelli is nothing more than a willed indifference to moral judgement. He could praise tyranny or censure it, applaud republicanism or scorn it—his attitude varied with circumstances, for he did not believe it possible to appeal to any other tribunal than brute circumstance.

When Napoleon said, "*J'aime le pouvoir comme artiste*," he was giving expression to an attitude towards politics which Machiavelli was the first to formulate. He preferred a more solemn analogy of himself as a *medico politico*; but it comes to the same thing. Art and medicine and all of natural science have it in common that, in medieval terminology, they do not require "rectitude of the appetite." They are judged only by results. An artist may be a lecher and a murderer, a surgeon may be a sadist—this is irrelevant to the judgement one passes on their work. But is it irrelevant to the work of the statesman? Since Machiavelli we have come to think so; which is why modern politics—all of modern politics—is managerial to the core.

DANTE put Brutus in hell, along with Satan and Judas; Machiavelli set the modern tone, extolled him as a defender of republic liberty; in Shakespeare we see the mixed feelings that attend the transition from the first perspective to the second—a transition which might be described, quite literally, as the “profanation” of politics: the removal of political authority, *qua* authority, from the shadows of sanctity that had always enveloped it, and its subjugation to the test of *la verità effettuale*. With this transition, there disappeared all of the crucial problems of the earlier political philosophy: under what conditions may a subject disobey a legitimate ruler? a tyrant? if disobedience is allowable, what form may it take? what is the relation between the temporal and the spiritual order? For Machiavelli, and for us, these questions do not exist—that is to say, they do exist of course, but we do not grant them *de jure* recognition.

As it happens, Machiavelli’s intervention was largely a matter of accident—it was much less

a case of his converting later generations than of their sanctifying him. Of science or scientific method, he knew nothing. What he did have was an intuition, not of scientific method, but of human reality as it would appear were it simply an object of scientific method. It is an intuitive vision which has never been surpassed for its clarity, not even by our “political science,” which does not have the courage of its principles and ceremoniously marks time whenever its method threatens to bring it close to that no-man’s-land in which there is no “ought,” except what “is.”

Since Machiavelli, a dimension has been amputated from man’s political existence. The operation was a success; but there are stitches and scars, inevitably. It is in Machiavelli we see them most clearly, for he does not hesitate to wave the stumps at us, in order to make a point. Those riddles one finds in Machiavelli, those ambiguities and ironies—they mark the points where, the soul having been cut away, we are troubled with the illusion that “something” is still there.

W. S. Merwin

Saint Sebastian

So many times I have felt them come, Lord,
The arrows, (a coward dies often), so many times,
And worse, oh worse often than this. Neither breeze nor bird
Stirring the hazed peace through which the day climbs.

And slower even than the arrows, the few sounds that come
Falling, as across water, from where farther off than the hills
The archers move in a different world in the same
Kingdom. Oh, can the noise of angels,

The beat and whirring between Thy kingdoms
Be even by such cropped feathers raised? Not though
With the wings of the morning may I fly from Thee; for it is

Thy kingdom where (and the wind so still now)
I stand in pain; and, entered with pain as always,
Thy kingdom that on these erring shafts comes.

Letter from Holland

Dutch Interiors

STROLLING down one of Amsterdam's side streets in the early evening is like walking through a series of living rooms. The family groups clearly visible from the sidewalk are as stylised, and just about as public, as wax figures in a store window—the man smoking a pipe and reading his paper, the wife across the room sewing or knitting, the several children bent over their school-books, the dog napping in the right foreground. American or British suburbs approximate the smug dullness of this petty bourgeois idyll, but not, I think, its self-containing peace.

A hundred facts, ranging from the low illegitimacy and divorce rates to the results of public opinion polls, might be cited to illustrate the continuing dominant role of the family in Dutch society. Night life, except for tourists, hardly exists even in Amsterdam: one spends the evening at home, with one's wife and children. Almost all newspapers come out in the afternoon and are sold mostly through subscription: they are read at home, quietly, after dinner. Dutch is the only language I know of that has a specific word for the unit of man, wife, and children—*gezin*—in addition to *familie*, which means what sociologists call the “extended family” in English.

Since no casual visitor is likely to get an invitation to a Dutch home, he will usually not appreciate the importance of the family in Dutch culture. The tourist hurrying through fills his mind with trivia: florin and guilder mean the same thing, dogs are not “curbed,” sidewalks are scrubbed every Friday, Amsterdam's mail boxes are on the rear of the trolleys that go to the central post office. Even if he stays long enough to delve beneath these superficialities, however, he will probably get a very

lopsided impression of Holland. For, as in every country whose national income is based in part on tourists, the “attractions” to which his attention is directed are contrived to satisfy his expectations.

Thus, windmills do pepper the landscape, even if less thickly than on Delft china; but the last of these windmills was built more than a century ago, and most of them no longer grind grain or pump water. Now the government maintains them as “national monuments,” and unpicturesque Diesel engines do the work. No foreigner leaves Amsterdam without a tour of Marken and Volendam, two “fishing villages” whose picturesquely garbed inhabitants fish little but, speaking good English, French, or German, sell glimpses into their quaint pasts. The Alkmaar cheese market, to which every tourist agency runs special buses, is so overrun with camera'd foreigners that it is a distinct achievement to get an unencumbered photo of the costumed Dutch carrying cheeses to the 17th century weighing-house. Wooden shoes are still the standard footwear of the peasant and fisherman, and it is not likely that they will ever be replaced: they act like, as well as look like, small canal-boats, and on the often soggy ground they do more cheaply what rubber boots do elsewhere. In the cities, however, they are a rarity outside tourist shops. In one community, the last clog-carver works in a shop window and is paid his wage by the novelty manufacturers' association. It is sad to watch the world become more and more standardised, which in Western Europe means more and more Americanised; but is it really better to have folk customs artificially maintained, or revived, largely for their dollar value?

TULIPS, on the other hand, and flowers in general, are as much a part of the life of the people as the well-primed tourist expects. The bulb fields and the competitive exhibits of the various growers are more exciting even than their commercial description. In the smaller towns, the standard middle-class home is a one-family house, two rooms deep, opening front and back on gardens. In Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague, flowers often decorate homes, restaurants, museums, movies, bridges, squares, urinoirs, and even the bombed-out areas not yet rebuilt. At every second corner along the avenues there is a flower peddler who sells twenty perfect rosebuds for the equivalent of two shillings, to take an expensive example.

Physically at least, the western half of the country is a replica of the picture postcard. There are canals everywhere, as one expects, but nothing about them denotes the remarkable fact that they are flowing upward into the sea. The dikes that hold the sea back are also more interesting to read about than to look at. They are not walls, but embankments, with roads and sometimes houses on them. (No one who has ever seen one could be taken in by the fanciful story of Peter and his heroic thumb, but one community, aware of his popularity among tourists, has erected a statue in his honour.)

That Amsterdam is one of the most beautiful cities on the Continent is in part because its adaptation to modern life has not yet obliterated the old city. Its canals, gracefully curving in concentric rings around the central square, are lined with 17th century houses, each different and yet all in the same harmonious style. Today, these one-time patrician residences house institutions and business offices; there is a fascinating medley, or cacophony, of old and new—fine old mansions used as warehouses; a frontage often without sidewalks and with a truly medieval disregard of building lines, made dangerous for pedestrians by rumbling trucks; a passenger barge with blaring horns advertising the Liberal candidate. The houses are thriftily built, squeezed together like spectators watching a parade, with steep, narrow staircases going up like ladders. Windows are many, small, white-rimmed; in more recent buildings, they have an infinity of shape, size, and position, often giving a fillip to otherwise uninspired architecture.

A truer symbol of present-day Holland than the windmill, and really a less commonplace one, is the bicycle. In Holland, the bicycle is not an independent vehicle, but one member of a school of fish, a swarm of gnats. A dozen bikes, or a hundred, move down the street in flexible unity, encompassing a stopped trolley, impatiently pausing at the infrequent traffic lights, thinning out when the speedsters get a chance to show their mettle, thickening again as the traffic grows heavier—but moving always as a whole, with a life of its own. There was an ordinance prohibiting riders from taking more than one child passenger on a bicycle, but it was withdrawn in response to indignant protests. There is a brass band, with every member on a bike; it proclaims itself, correctly I am sure, as unique in the entire world. There is an escalator, undoubtedly also unique, constructed large enough to hold bikes and their riders. Groups of all kinds cycle together—the young man with his girl sitting side-saddle behind; another couple each on a bike and holding hands; a mother going shopping with her youngest in a little seat on the handlebars, her next youngest in a little wicker chair at the back; a family going on an outing strung out one behind the other, with the youngest children distributed over several bikes; the delivery bicycle or tricycle in its hundred variations. When, at five in the evening, all these groups coalesce into a purposeful homeward-bound stream, it is an adventure for even a native of Manhattan to cross the street. In his charming *Letters from Holland*, Karel Capek discusses the dangerous ubiquity of bikes and ends with a speculation on the effect they may have had on the Dutch national character:

Now that [the bicycles] cannot get their own back on me, I don't mind declaring quite openly that I didn't like them, because to my mind it is somewhat unnatural for a man to be sitting and stepping forward at the same time. The practice of stepping forward while seated can ultimately affect the pace of a nation's development. It becomes possible to tread slowly and nevertheless to get along quickly. You realize this when you see how far the Dutch have gone, although they tread at about the same rate as a slow-motion film. But I, arm-swinging pedestrian that I am, will not interfere with their bicycles; let every nation follow its star by the methods which it understands.

HOLLAND has more studies of national character than anyone will ever read. A generation ago, under the very powerful influence of S. R. Steinmetz, Dutch social scientists turned from the then current arm-chair philosophising and began to develop an empirical school of their own, called sociography. A sociographic study attempts to relate all the data concerning a given locality in a meaningful way—geographical factors, the characteristics of the population, social history, economics, culture, folklore. At its best, as when a good sociologist writes about the region where he was born, it can combine personal intimacy with scientific detachment in a way seldom otherwise achieved. But at the usual level of doctoral dissertations, these studies are as sterile, in my opinion, as most of the empirical work being done in the United States. While it is a useful exercise for a student to study in detail a small unit of society—a portion of a province, a village, sometimes even a single parish—too often this conditions the range of his thought. Dutch social scientists tend to speak either of “man” or of the inhabitants of this or that particular area, and there is a marked paucity of work about the present-day Netherlands as a whole: no satisfactory social history, no study of its population, no economic history, no general sociological work.

The usual description of the Dutch national character is “petty bourgeois.” In one of his essays, Otto Jespersen related this estimate to the extraordinary frequency of the diminutive ending in the Dutch language. Even in scientific discourse, not to mention ordinary conversation, the diminutive is almost as frequent as in an old-fashioned English-speaking nursery. Jespersen concluded that the Dutch are a petty bourgeois people living in a small country with small ideas. While this is certainly deducing too much from too little, it seems to me that the often dubious study of national character can reasonably be approached through language, particularly through the study of essentially untranslatable words. A list of words unique to Dutch would include, among many others, two that one hears very often: *netjes*, which combines the meanings of nice, cute, clean, pleasant, proper—a Dutch woman social scientist who visited the United States remarked on her return that she found America “hygienic but not *netjes*”; and *deftig*, by which upper-

class businessmen are often described—seriously before the war and today sometimes ironically—and which means dignified, elegant, fashionable, aristocratic, distinguished, stately, proper. In Dutch, the word *schoon*, like its German cognate *schön*, can mean beautiful, but as a development from the national passion for housecleaning, its usual current meaning is clean, or clean-beautiful.

ANOTHER way to approach the question of national character is through the results of public opinion polls. Based on the results of these polls: 18 per cent of the Dutch people believe that one can foretell the future, through the stars, palm-reading, and other methods; 7 per cent have had telepathic experiences (with respect to occultism in general, Holland seems to be the Southern California of the Continent); 28 per cent go to at least one concert a year, 48 per cent to at least one play; 40 per cent were reading books at the time they were questioned (compared with 21 per cent in the United States, 55 per cent in England); 30 per cent read the Bible regularly, including only 3 per cent of the Catholics; 68 per cent would like to have blue eyes; 47 per cent of the tenants consider their rent cheap; 53 per cent of the women wear nylons; 47 per cent of the women do not approve of mixed bathing (this is a recurrent issue in the press; it is forbidden in some parts of the country); 85 per cent of all homes have a spring cleaning.

Twenty-four per cent regard the United States as an example to follow, 8 per cent Russia, 58 per cent no country; 45 per cent approve of world government; 38 per cent think English ought to be the world language, 29 per cent Esperanto (instructions in public telephone booths are printed in five languages, including Esperanto).

A generation ago, all college students in the Netherlands were required to study six languages, and Greek was dropped from the general curriculum only after a considerable campaign. Simultaneous instruction in English, French, and German is now begun at the age of thirteen or fourteen, and college freshmen are given reading lists including books in all three languages as a matter of course. The professor of one course in modern history that I attended in Amsterdam, trying to give an impression of pre-1914 Europe, illustrated his

points by reading passages in their original from Stefan Zweig and H. G. Wells. In the better bookstores, books are arranged by subject-matter rather than language. Stenographers are expected to be able to take dictation in at least two, and preferably three, foreign languages. On the other hand, the smattering that all educated people have of these three languages seldom rises to a real command; and even in government or university publications the written English is usually poor.

DUTCH culture is not only "petty bourgeois" but Christian. How pervasive religion remains in the lives of the people can be appreciated in almost any feature of Dutch society, from the incidental to the most basic. A serious discussion on any subject is likely to get under way by exchanging information on the participants' religious faiths; this sets the line and determines whether certain fundamentals can be assumed or must be included. A meal at someone's home begins with what a German-born acquaintance called "the Dutch moment," during which each person, before he begins eating, surreptitiously observes whether the other is first going to pray. In restaurants of any class, one sees people praying; at the luncheon break during the annual convention of the Netherlands Sociological Society, the chairman asked for a moment of silence so that those members who wanted to could pray. Trolley posters admonish young girls to maintain their chastity and tell readers to speak freely of God but not to take His name in vain.

At any hour of any day, one can turn on the radio and hear "Let us pray." There are two radio stations in Holland, both government-owned, and programme time on them is divided among the various radio societies—Catholic, several Calvinist, Labour, and Liberal—in proportion to their support among listeners. Each society issues its own magazine featuring its own programmes and its own message; a periodical that listed all the programmes, with the propaganda of none of the groups, was forced by the courts to cease publication. The various programme directors compete for the listener's attention with some of the same high-pressure methods that any American finds familiar, but with the difference

that they plug their faiths rather than their sponsors' soap or corn flakes.

The division of all Dutch life along religious lines begins with the segregation of children into Catholic, Calvinist, or secular schools. Typically, a Dutch child plays only with children of his own faith, and he learns early that the *andersdenkende*—those with another point of view—are queer. When he grows up, his friends are of the same religion, he marries in his own faith, joins the party and trade union associated with his church, reads his church's newspapers and periodicals, often even buys in stores owned by those of his faith. The Dutch, it has been said, have as many dikes in their mental life as on their countryside.

WHY should a people in the geographical centre of north-west Europe have clung so tenaciously to traditions that elsewhere have been disappearing? In a world increasingly socialist, Holland has retained many of the old petty bourgeois norms in not only its ideology but also its day-to-day life. In a world more and more secularist, Holland has remained a stronghold of traditional Christian faith, both Catholic and Protestant. The causes of these differences lie deep, and to explain them is not simple. The whole of Dutch history, from the very foundation of the state, is relevant.

Modern Holland was born in an eighty-year war of independence against Catholic Spain. From the beginning, nationalism and Protestantism were like opposite sides of the same coin; the relation between church and state was like that between left and right hand. The amazing victory against Philip's mighty empire was followed by the truly incredible growth of Holland's wealth and culture. This small people, living on the mud-flats at the mouths of the Rhine and Meuse, developed its herring fleet into the world's largest merchant marine. With the fabulous wealth of Java and a near-monopoly of the spice trade, Holland became the most prosperous nation of the 17th century, competing with Louis XIV's France and outshining Britain. Peter, later Tsar of all the Russias, who travelled to Haarlem to learn ship-building, was only the most famous of the thousands of foreign artisans who came to Holland to learn their trade. Dutch canals and brick-paved roads were the marvel of all Europe. In spite of her niggardly natural

resources, Holland built a universal culture to the heights of Rembrandt, Grotius, Spinoza, Huygens, van Leeuwenhoek—to name the giants among the scores of others who graced 17th century Holland.

Religion was at the very base of this rich culture, the prime reason for its extraordinary growth. When Max Weber tried to show that what he termed the Protestant Ethic had been a necessary precondition to the development of modern capitalism, he could find no better example of this thesis than Calvinist Holland. According to Calvinist doctrine, each man is predestined to salvation or to eternal damnation. Nothing he can do can change his fate, but (according to the doctrine as it developed after Calvin) his status on earth can be taken as a sign of what his lot after death will be; for does not God favour His elect in this world as well as the next? That is to say, the full religious fervour of a pious people became a stimulus to commerce and other secular activity. It was the Protestant Ethic that made the 17th century Holland's Golden Era.

In the 18th century, however, Holland suffered a gradual decline from this peak, first in trade, then in other sectors of the economy, finally in her entire culture. The very fact that Holland's success in commerce had been so phenomenal inhibited the rise of industry: the burghers who had become wealthy in trade would not invest in factories. Thus, once the decline set in, it was never again possible to approach the splendour of the Golden Era. Britain's culture is built on its Victorian base, the 19th century fruition of her industry and empire; France's is derivative from the rationalism and revolutionary élan of the 18th century; but Holland still harks back to the 17th century. This means that "the heroic struggle" of Protestant Holland against Catholic Spain is not merely one echo of a faded tradition but a part of living national sentiment.

The rationalist, materialist, secular emphasis of Western culture developed in 18th century France, and the doctrines of the French Revolution (in a diluted and distorted form) were spread over Europe by the medium of Napoleon's armies. Mercantile Holland, however, was a modern country before the French Revolution: there were no serfs to be freed, as in the Germanies, no Inquisition to be outlawed, as in Spain. Since the function of Napoleon's armies in Holland was not to bring

the Rights of Man, the principal effect of the eighteen years of oppressive occupation was to reinforce the House of Orange, the Netherlands Reformed Church, and every other element of social traditionalism.

When her independence was restored in 1815, Holland was at the lowest point in her modern history. Half the town population were on the dole; most of the other half were little better off. Infant mortality ranged from one-third to one-half; life expectancy was estimated at thirty-four years. Misery was drowned in gin. Thousands died in cholera epidemics. In these same years, a number of ministers seceded from the Netherlands Reformed Church, which had been the state church and remained the church of the ruling class. Though Calvinist in origin, the Reformed Church was insufficiently Calvinist in doctrine and attitude for part of its lower-middle-class membership. In its social content, this schism was the Dutch counterpart of the 1830 revolutions on the Continent or the Chartist movement in England. As in all the series of complicated schisms and unions over the following 120 years, the break with the parent church was formally based on religious differences, but each time some whose theology should have led them to secede chose to remain because of the higher social status associated with the Reformed Church. Thus, the group of quarreling, more rigid sects—which can be designated collectively as the Orthodox Calvinists—have had an influence quite disproportionate to their relatively small numbers. Their unyielding traditionalism in social and political questions has echoed in the conscience of the more orthodox wing of the main church, which has acted in turn as a bridge to the centre of Dutch social and political power.

Around the middle of the 19th century, there were two contending forces, almost too amorphous to be called parties: the Liberals and the Conservatives. The Conservatives were reactionary in the literal sense of the word, but did not agree among themselves how far back they wanted to go. They gradually lost power to the Liberals, who began to split into left and right wings and then into smaller groupings, principally over the issue of how far and how fast suffrage should be extended. There was a political vacuum and no industrial proletariat to fill it, for modern industry only began to develop in Holland after 1870. The

vacuum was filled by a coalition between Orthodox Calvinists and Catholics, both underprivileged groups just beginning to rise from their torpor.

FOR two centuries after the Dutch nation was born in the war against Catholic Spain, the large Catholic minority were second-class citizens. The constitution of 1848 gave Catholics equal suffrage, and during the several following decades the Catholic community sought new means of self-expression. Newspapers and literary journals were started by the dozen, manifestos were written, Catholic historians dug into sources and wrote learned tomes to break the link between *Protestant* and *nation*. In this ferment, after several false starts, a Catholic State Party was founded by Herman Schaepman, a poet-priest turned politician. During the same period, Abraham Kuyper—an Orthodox Calvinist minister, founder and editor of a daily, author of several hundred books and pamphlets—founded the Anti-Revolutionary Party, which consciously and explicitly held up the Old Testament in opposition to 18th century rationalism and the principles of the French Revolution.

Slowly, persistently, fighting against the prejudices within their own groups, Schaepman and Kuyper built the foundation of a future coalition. The first important cooperation was in what the Dutch call “the school fight,” the seventy-five-year struggle to get and widen state support of religious schools. In 1886, after the largest extension of suffrage to date, the two parties won an important victory and formed the first Calvinist-Catholic cabinet. There was a Liberal comeback, but from the 1890’s to the Second World War, with minor interruptions and variations, Holland was ruled by this coalition. It eventually combined many of the progressive features of socialist parties elsewhere—wider suffrage, full rights to trade unions, social legislation—with measures designed to maintain Holland no longer as a Protestant but as a Christian nation.

While every important area of social life has been shaped by this Christian government, the first, education, remained the most important. The first coalition government got state subsidies for both Catholic and Calvinist parochial primary schools; and over the years, in a struggle that has influenced Holland’s

political life more than any other, the subsidies were gradually increased in size and extended over wider and wider areas. Free primary education, attacked as unfair competition to religious schools, was finally abolished; and today pupils must pay at the same rate in all schools, with the deficit in all made up by the state. One of the last big fights took place when Kuyper founded a university and his party pushed through a bill subsidising institutions of higher learning. In 1918, there was a grand “pacification”—a compromise by which the religious parties voted for female suffrage and the Liberals and Socialists accepted government subsidies for religious schools as inviolable. The hope that this would end the school fight was fulfilled, however, only in the sense that the secularists no longer had the forces and spirit for more than minor skirmishes. In 1952, for example, government subsidies were extended to special Catholic and Calvinist trade schools, against only nominal opposition.

THE socialist movement had been started in the 1870’s by a group of German emigrés, and for some fifty years it followed the pattern of the German Social Democrats—the discussions around Revisionism at the turn of the century, the split into a more moderate Right and a more orthodox Left (although in Holland the Left was in many respects less Marxian than anarchist), even a one-day mock revolution in 1918. During the interwar period, however, the socialist leaders gradually turned more and more to the British Labour Party as their model, particularly in the effort to seek a broader base than merely the industrial proletariat. This transition was completed by the cooperation of underground groups during the Nazi occupation, and the socialists emerged from that experience with a new name, the Labour Party, and a new philosophy. Their key concept was “the breakthrough”: they wanted to shatter the old religious parties and realign the electorate into the mass of workers, farmers, intellectuals, and middle class, all organised into the Labour Party, versus a small conservative minority. These tactics failed completely. A comparison of the results of the last pre-war and the first post-war elections shows how little difference five years of war and occupation made in party affiliation. The new Labour Party was supported

by the same percentage of the electorate as the several pre-war socialist and progressive groups that had united to form it, but by no more.

The central feature of every post-war government in the Netherlands has been a Catholic-Labour coalition, and no government on any other basis would be stable. The weakness of Labour politics is aggravated by the fact that, in the centre, the Catholics are in the strategic position: if pushed to it, they could conceivably unite with enough of the parties on the Right to form a weak cabinet, but for the Labourites the choice is coalition with the Catholics or out of the government. Thus, while the change from Calvinist-Catholic to Catholic-Labour as the typical coalition has reflected a real shift to the Left, it has brought about fewer changes than one might suppose. Particularly in those areas in which the Church has special interests—religion, education, family welfare, public morals—the Catholic party calls the tune, and the Labourites dance to it as cheerfully as they can.

POST-WAR Dutch politics has been dominated by the contrast between the constricted economy and the rapidly growing population. Not only did the country suffer very heavily from the war and Nazi occupation (and, more recently, from flood damage), but it lost the Indies, which used to contribute one-sixth of the Dutch national income. On the other hand, the population has grown from five million in 1900 to more than ten million today. This remarkable growth has resulted from a very low mortality, the effect of excellent social services available in every village, and a fertility so high as to have become one of demography's important unsolved puzzles.

One of the reasons for Holland's high fertility is so simple that it defies analysis: the Dutch like children. If in the United States the national ideal of feminine beauty is the adolescent girl with perfectly regular features and high breasts; if in France it is the somewhat more mature, more experienced woman; in Holland it is the young mother, comely rather than beautiful, simple and dutiful rather than brilliant. The repetitive pictures of Queen Juliana with her several daughters—crossing the street with a baby in her arms, amateurishly skiing with an older girl, sitting at home with

her husband and family—are at least as effective, I think, in maintaining the traditional family ideal as in fulfilling their more conscious purpose, to symbolise national unity. Several of the young intellectuals I met, precariously beginning their careers, were willing to make extraordinary sacrifices in order to begin their families immediately; and with them the question was not the unavailability of contraceptives, as often in the countryside, or moral qualms against using them, as among the more devout Calvinists and the Catholics, but one of taste. The American concept of being able to "afford" a baby, one of them told me, is barbaric.

The birth-control movement in Holland has a semi-legal status. The national law designed to hamper its growth is reinforced, particularly in the Catholic South, by more stringent local ordinances. Nevertheless, legal restriction is a less effective impediment than the general sentiment that respectable people do not discuss birth control, in any terms or in any context: even the several conferences on population problems that I attended refused to hear the neo-Malthusian point of view. When the official journal of the Netherlands Medical Association published one short article on birth control in December 1949, it was showered with cancellations and denunciatory letters, in some of which the physician-correspondents displayed gross ignorance of even the medical aspects of contraception. Medical students in general are taught nothing of birth control; and even in Amsterdam, the least hidebound of the universities, it was only recently, after a long, uphill fight, that the local head of the planned parenthood society was given permission to conduct free private classes for medical students interested enough to attend. Nevertheless, particularly since the war, the Netherlands Society for Sexual Reform, as it terms itself, has grown rapidly, and it now has more than 50,000 members. More than that—virtually all members of all groups now practice some birth control; the question is only whether honestly or hypocritically, whether with effective or ineffective means.

The sanctioned solutions of the growing population pressure are, over the long run, industrialisation and, for the more immediate future, emigration. The intense interest in emigration, evident in all media of public expression, would in any case have developed

a large outward movement; and this has been reinforced by the government, which has made a series of bilateral agreements with several countries and has organised and subsidised the passage of emigrants. During the eight-year period 1946-53, there were more than 180,000 such sponsored emigrants, principally to Canada and Australia. However, the total post-war emigration from the Netherlands has been only about one-fourth of the natural increase in the population.

The inherent difficulties of an industrialisation programme in a country with few natural resources, a relatively immobile labour force, and no established market for industrial products, cannot be overcome easily; and in the Netherlands they have been aggravated by the ambiguous attitude of many policy-makers towards industrialisation. All groups recognise that industry is necessary, but many fear its social consequences no less than they look forward to its economic benefits. The sociological journal of the Netherlands Reformed Church has conducted a series of surveys to try to determine to what extent industry has resulted in increased secularisation. In Catholic discussions of the issue, there are strong echoes of Wilhelm Röpke's programme of spreading industry through a countryside rather than concentrating it in towns, in an effort to maintain the social values of the village. While it is impossible to gauge the precise effect of these religious qualms, certainly they are not unrelated to the complaint, often heard in Holland, that industrialisation is proceeding too slowly.

The rapid population growth has been at disparate rates in the various religious groups. In particular, the Catholic minority, about a third of the total population in 1900, is now almost forty per cent; and in the youngest sector of the population the proportion is higher. Catholic and other periodicals continually speculate about what will happen when the figure reaches 51 per cent. Quite apart from whether this will happen and, if so, when, the discussion does much right now to exacerbate religious tensions. It must be emphasised that Dutch Catholics retain much of the pugnacity developed in their struggle for full civil status; they have none of the easy-going

liberalism to be found among some of their French or Belgian co-religionists.

PERSONS inclined to be optimistic about the prospects for Western European unity should make a thorough study of its smaller precursor, Benelux. Seldom have so much hard work, so much good will, such wide support, produced so few practical results. Holland and Belgium have been united several times in their past history, their economies are more complementary than competitive, they have a largely common culture and a common language (Flemish, the second official language of Belgium, is a variant of Dutch); but the achievements of Benelux to date have been hardly more than a continuation of the former trade and tariff agreements, dignified by a grandiose name. On the other hand, if the urge towards West European unity develops, it will be because the recognition of its utter necessity becomes as general as it is in Holland. One reason that the Dutch people and government are in the forefront of this struggle, of course, is that, since commerce is so important in its economy, Holland *must* try to revise the archaic European system. But this is not a sufficient answer: West European integration is the first condition for the survival of every country concerned.

The key question, again, is Germany. The hatred of Germany and Germans among the Dutch is, so far as I could judge, more widespread and intense than, for example, in France. When I first arrived in the country and spoke Dutch still with a strong admixture of German words and idiom, I was treated by passers-by and minor officials like a pariah—an unusual but edifying experience for a dollared American in Europe. Nevertheless, many people are responsible enough to see that it is necessary to seek out what good survived the Nazis in Germany, to try to develop it and cooperate with it. It is difficult, if not impossible, to remember with full vividness every horrible detail of Nazi atrocity, and yet to seek a mode of common existence with some of the Germans who participated in it; and that the Dutch attempt to do *both* shows at least glimmerings of the imagination that the present situation demands.

William Petersen

The Kitchen Sink

WE have by now a pretty clear idea of the prevailing tastes of the generation of painters who have come of age since the war. They are fond of painting big pictures—often bigger than seems necessary—as if to do so were a matter of principle. They like laying it on thick when it comes to surface-texture, as if they wanted to make painting a form of low-relief, often using the palette-knife to build up a heavy crust of paint, variations in the thickness of which take the place of variations of tone and colour, or dribbling paint straight from the tube on to the canvas. And beyond these characteristics common to so many young painters both abstract and realistic, the latter have another to themselves. It resides in their choice of subject-matter when they are painting still lifes and interiors.

THE things that painters choose to put into their still lifes and interiors can be seen as a key to their whole orientation.

The world of Bonnard and Vuillard is furnished with the appurtenances of a comfortable French middle-class home—the arm-chairs and the dressing-tables, the baths and the looking-glasses, the bowls of fruit and the vases of flowers and the tables laden with food and drink. With Matisse there is still a strongly bourgeois atmosphere, only with a more exotic flavour, for the householder has acquired such properties as oriental rugs, bronze statuettes and Moorish screens, and, in his wealthy old age, several paintings by Matisse. From this well-appointed setting we are sometimes taken for a change of air to spacious bedrooms in hotels in Nice or to the artist's studio where suddenly we are brought face to face with the metaphysics of the creative act and comforts are forgotten.

The cubists live in quite another world, one that is bohemian and in a quiet way rather

bacchanalian (even their preferred fruit is the grape). It consists of wine- and beer- and absinthe-glasses, bottles of wine and bottles of brandy, carafes, pipes and cigarette-packets, newspapers, playing-cards, billiard-tables, dice, chess-boards, mandolins, violins, and guitars. The life of the cubists is the life of the cafés. It is also the last view of life to have been formed by a generation of painters before the world was overturned in 1914. The next generation dwells on the more sinister connotations of the phrase *nature morte*. The still lifes of Soutine always depict motifs which could be found in the kitchen, but a kitchen which might be a sacrificial altar, for all we see are close-ups of the carcasses of slaughtered cattle and poultry and fish, and they still seem to be squirming in their dying agony. Even the occasional piece of cutlery looks like an instrument of torture.

Up to this point, the iconography of 20th century still life makes no fundamental break with the past. Surrealism, however, transformed the conventions of this iconography alongside every other: in fact, this transformation was its very *raison d'être*. Things not normally seen in conjunction are startlingly juxtaposed. The things themselves acquire uncharacteristic properties: pocket-watches become pliable objects which can be draped like a towel over the back of a chair. For the world of surrealist still lifes and interiors is not the world of the drawing-room or the kitchen or the café but the world of dreams.

With Giacometti and Gruber we return to waking realities. In their world the only room is a studio. It is the world of the dedicated artist. Even when their wives and mistresses and relations take up position in this setting to pose for them, we feel they are pretending to be models paid by the hour. The traditional pattern is reversed, for what the painter is generally supposed to do is to try and paint the

professional model as if he or she were a person not a model (*il n'y a rien du modèle* is the ideal). But here somebody known as a person, loved as a person, is seen as a model, because every human feeling must be subordinated to the artist's terrible and all-consuming dedication to his work. The same feeling, that the subject's very humanity can be discovered, not by pretending that this is not a model, but by insisting that it is, can be found in some of Cézanne's later portraits and nudes. And Giacometti resembles Cézanne in that no small part of the emotional content expressed in his art is the anguish it costs to produce it.

The post-war generation takes us back from the studio to the kitchen. Dead ducks, rabbits and fish—especially skate—can be found there, as in the expressionist slaughterhouse, but only as part of an inventory which includes every kind of food and drink, every kind of utensil and implement, the usual plain furniture, and even the baby's nappies on the line. Everything but the kitchen sink? The kitchen sink too. The point is that it is a very ordinary kitchen, lived in by a very ordinary family. There is nothing to hint that the man about the house is an artist or anything but a very ordinary bloke. It may have the air of a peasant's kitchen, as with Paul Rebeyrolle, or of a proletarian kitchen, as with Jack Smith, or, as with John Bratby, it may not suggest a particular social background so much as a compelling sense of modern life, because of its profusion of packaged groceries. But in every case it is clearly a kitchen in which ordinary people cook their ordinary food, and doubtless live their ordinary lives.

THE contents of humble kitchens have long been a subject beloved of painters. It is a subject which epitomises the commonplace, and painters tend to rejoice in the commonplace ("Copy your stovepipe," said Cézanne). Their reason is that things which are commonplace are free of highly specialised associations which might come between the painter and his object. This predilection is therefore one to which realistic painters in particular are prone, though it is certainly not confined to them alone. (Even Delacroix did in fact copy his stovepipe, while the remark "Painters make pictures as princes make their children—with shepherdesses," was an utterance of Picasso's.)

Since painters often paint ordinary things

from ordinary kitchens precisely because their associations are so general as to cancel themselves out, it should never be too hastily assumed that their choice of such subjects has social implications—that they are concerned to sentimentalise the peasantry, glorify the proletariat, or pity the poor. When Giacometti painted a single apple all alone on a sideboard, it was clearly not with the intention of symbolising poverty: the objectivity of the treatment makes it clear that he was interested in what an apple on a sideboard looks like, not in what it might mean. So soon, however, as the painter ceases to be concerned above all with the faithful rendering of the observed facts, and begins to distort and stylise things to a marked degree, it becomes possible that his choice of subject was consciously determined by its affective significance. It almost certainly will have been if the distortion is of the kind known as emotive, which is found in Soutine. It almost certainly will not have been if the distortion is of the kind known as plastic, which is found in cubism or purism. Here the subject will have served merely as a pretext for an æsthetic arrangement of forms. So the choice of subject in this kind of painting is as far as in the most strictly objective painting from having a manifest affective significance (needless to say, a *latent*, an unconscious, affective significance is possessed by every kind of painter's choice of subject). Thus the most abstract and the most representational painters join hands, because both tend to paint the object without first naming it.

It is evident that neither objectivity nor abstraction is the aim of the young painters of the kitchen-sink school. The cubist and abstract tradition is clearly what they are rebelling against, and doubtless they would all concur with Rebeyrolle's statement, "I think we are going to see a renewal of realist painting with all that this brings with it of the expression of human feeling. I believe that we are going to get away from formalism and art for art's sake." But if they are realist, they are not objective in their realism, like Velasquez, or David, or Degas, or even Manet, or in our own time Coldstream, for their drawing and colour are highly simplified and distorted, and their design tends to be picturesque. They lean strongly towards romanticism or expressionism. Any realism to which they can lay claim is a social not a visual realism.

So it is that Rebeyrolle, Minaux and their followers are influenced to some extent by van Gogh and principally by the "Realism" of Courbet's work of the years 1849 to 1856—that is, the period of his development which begins with the *Après-Dîner à Ornans* and ends with *La Curée* and in which his manner is a sort of genre style inflated to an epic scale and made to serve a symbolic or allegorical purpose (a barbarous usage if ever there was one; but genius can afford to be barbaric). The point of this kind of painting is the sense of gravity, both physical and moral, which it confers on all material things (thereby to confound metaphysics, religion and everything speculative and undemocratic, since, in Courbet's words, it is the "affirmation of the negation of the ideal and all that springs from the ideal"). But our neo-"Realists" lack the one quality which is indispensable to making this kind of painting work: the ability to draw things so that they look solid.

They fail to give things their proper density, so that, so far from looking weightier than in reality, as with Courbet, their specific gravity seems to be that of cardboard. And while they construct things in such a way as to make a coherent design on the surface of the picture, considered as representations they seem to be falling to bits. The trouble is that, for all their talk of rejecting "formalism," these painters design after the fashion of synthetic cubism or of fauvism. The consequence of this discrepancy between intention and conception is that their big bold canvases have the effect of picturesque and sentimental posters advertising the rough graces of the rustic life.

With Jack Smith, the influence of van Gogh is not subordinate but predominant. Van Gogh seems to have influenced his method of drawing, his cultivation of pattern, his treatment of perspective, his use of monochrome, though in his case this is not yellow but grey. But here again the pupil lacks the qualities appropriate to the master's style. The secret of van Gogh lies in his passionate identification with the object, both its form and its meaning. With Smith I feel that his subject has served as a pretext for making a picture: the glasses and jugs are too beautiful to be true in this stark setting; and what is the purpose, if it is not a purely æsthetic purpose, of those areas of patchwork-quilt patterning which are so reminiscent of Vieira da Silva? The kitchen is furnished

like a poor man's kitchen, but the painter might equally well have been painting a rich man's drawing-room for all the difference it would have made. I sense no imaginative necessity for the painter's choice of his particular subject-matter. This does not prevent his paintings from being handsome æsthetic arrangements. But it does mean that as an interpretation of life they contradict themselves.

John Bratby's work, in contrast, is, for a young man's, remarkably free of mannerisms copied from the great. Easily the most expressionist of all these painters, his work also has affinities with van Gogh's, only here the affinity is less of style than of spirit: violent brushwork and strident colour are the manifestation of a desperate intensity of vision, are an act of surrender to the terrible vitality of things. The objects are piled up in a chaotic profusion which has something helpless about it, helpless because the painter seems to be saying, "There's so much in the world, one can't hope to stop and organise it: there's only time to fix it, to trap the whole mess as it is."

But if there is life and exultation in Bratby's work, there is also the drawback that in expressing the disorder of reality it is itself disordered. Van Gogh, in the very act of surrendering to the chaos of nature, renders it coherent, transforming all that it contains into a consistent system of shapes conceived in relation to one another and to the flatness of the canvas, shapes with an innate meaning which infuse the object with overtones and echoes rendering it more ambiguous and mysterious than it is in reality, only to heighten its very reality. In Bratby's work this transformation is not brought about: his shapes are too literal and at the same time very approximate, so that they become caricatures of objects. It is this that makes his paintings disordered: the objects piled up in them remain too much themselves, so that in conveying the anarchy of life they bring that anarchy with them. This is what is wrong, not the tendency of his composition to be untidy, for in Bratby's case this untidiness can be considered a defect only from an academic standpoint. But there is a further cause for the disorder, one which goes hand in hand with the failure to transform objects into new shapes and which likewise fails precisely where van Gogh so marvellously succeeds. It is his handling of paint, which is used with all the exuberance of van Gogh but

none of his eloquence, none of his sense of *direction*. I know that Bratby's quality of paint has come in for a good deal of praise. But I for my part consider it an enthusiastic mess.

THESE painters and their followers by no means confine themselves to still life. They all do portraits, nudes, landscapes, which have the same virtues and defects. It remains to mention a related painter of their generation, Bernard Buffet, who is something of a case apart, with followers of his own (of whom Minaux, in fact, was one in his early work). He is a case apart because, while he uses an iconography similar to theirs, he is not a *coloriste* but a *dessinateur*; one, moreover, with a highly schematic and rigid language of forms. He reduces colour to a grey monochrome; paints very thinly, using the wrong end of the brush to scrawl calligraphic convolutions over the painted surface in order to give it texture; outlines a highly simplified and rather geometric contour of the object and leaves it lying perfectly flat on the picture-plane; elongates forms until they are grotesquely slender.

The inevitable result is an effect of austere melancholy. It sails, of course, very close indeed to the wind of absurdity, often gets blown away by it (though in the figure-paintings rather than the still lifes), but is saved by the extraordinary tension between his shapes which Buffet manages to establish on the picture-surface—a tension which convinces us that the picture is the outcome of a particular experience, not just the rehearsal of his style. This is painting, which, while it may be thought too wilfully idiosyncratic, is free of pretentiousness, because it makes no attempt to disguise either its romanticism or its rootedness in “formalism.” It is mood-painting (the mood, of course, being *angst*) and at the same time decoration, in its luxuriantly austere, joyfully joyless way. I believe it to be more subtle and imaginative and distinguished than any other work produced by the kitchen-sink school. As to the fame which has been gained by the others, it is as well to remember that the graveyard of artistic reputations is littered with the ruins of expressionistic painters whose youthful outpourings once took the world by storm.

David Sylvester

R. S. Thomas

A Welsh Ballad Singer

Thomas Edwards— Twm o'r Nant
 If you prefer it—that's my name,
 Truth's constant flame purging my heart
 Of malice and of mean cant.
 Out of the night and the night's cold
 I come knocking at your door ;
 But not begging, my wares are verse
 Too costly for you to set
 Your purse against. Yet if you've bread
 And cheese and beer and fresh cake,
 I'll match them with as good a song
 As you've an ear for. But take heed ;
 Muck of the roads is on my boots,
 Dirt of the world clings to my tongue,
 The mind's pool is quickly stirred
 To bitterness. If you would keep
 Bad thoughts from fouling the song's course,
 Open your eyes' blue windows wide
 And let me sample your smile's worth.

BOOKS

Sir Winston's Predecessor

A RECENT book of memoirs by a contemporary of Lloyd George refers to him as a person whose lowly origins and circumstances rendered him unsuited for admission to the highest councils of the state, an opinion which can be applied with yet greater force to the case of Napoleon Bonaparte. It is perhaps only in England that such ideas can be expressed without meeting anger or ridicule in a prohibitive measure. The belief that the gentleman uses power with more conscience than the self-made man persists widely and vigorously in spite of much heated opposition. English class-feeling is strengthened by a deep moral feeling that is missing from this kind of reaction elsewhere. As a result it can play a profound part in shaping British destinies.

The climax of Lloyd George's life, and of Mr. Frank Owen's admirable record,* is to be found in the events of the year 1917, and the month that went before when Lloyd George rose to the premiership and immediately entered on his struggle with the military hierarchy. The resemblance to 1940 is remarkable but very misleading. For one thing, Neville Chamberlain was more public-spirited and accommodating in his fall than was Asquith, and whereas Sir Winston Churchill had in the course of seven years made himself by 1940 into a personification of the purpose of the war

against Nazism, Lloyd George in 1917 was still remembered as an unpatriotic anti-war agitator, and a foul-mouthed demagogue who had made enemies on the Left and Right. His chief claim to be allowed unprecedented power was that two and a half years of war had proved him to be the greatest administrator of his time.

It is easy to see now that, if he had waited, he might have become Prime Minister in response to an irresistible demand, as happened to Sir Winston; and then he would have enjoyed real power. As it was he had to make so many concessions to his varied following that his power was often illusory, and always so in regard to military appointments. Haig was looked on as a sacred object and it was thoroughly understood that if Lloyd George tried to remove him he would face a revolt in the House of Commons which would be generally supported in the country. Mr. Owen says: "The most popular Press in Britain was backing the belief that the politicians were self-seeking rascals, whereas the generals and admirals were men like gods." Lord Beaverbrook has given the most interesting first-hand evidence for this worship of the service hierarchies in his book *Politicians and the War*. It was a state of mind which was shattered by the war literature of the twenties and thirties, by Siegfried Sassoon's poems, and by David Low's creation of his famous bogey-man "Colonel Blimp." But in 1917 it was almost the faith of a nation. The veneration once given

* *Tempestuous Journey: Lloyd George, His life and Times*. By FRANK OWEN. Hutchinson. 25s.

to Boulanger in France had been given to Kitchener in England, and was being transferred to Haig and Robertson. In his conflict with the soldiers, there was always some class-feeling, and it always worked against Lloyd George's interest. He might have been able to win if he had been an aristocrat like Haig, or a simple plebeian like Robertson, for the question was largely one of romantic emotion, and remains so. But for all his long hair and colourful language and his cloaks and Welsh mountains, Lloyd George was not a figure suited to popular romantic taste. In open conflict with Haig, the Scots laird could not have been humiliated by the "Welsh attorney" without violent protest from an unusually misinformed public. Lloyd George had to trim his sails in accordance with the prevalent faith. The result was Passchendaele.

SHOULD he have come out into the open at the time of Passchendaele, and risked not merely his own political ruin but what he sincerely believed to be the ruin of the only form of government capable of obtaining victory? It appears that he himself was in doubt in after years. "It is said that I ought to . . . have stopped the carnage," he wrote in his memoirs. "Let me confess that there were, and still are, moments when I am of the same opinion." But he added that the whole press was against his view, and was with that of the Commander-in-Chief; and so, having respect for the gravity of the time, and the possibility of a total French collapse, he allowed the battle to go to its end with the greatest loss of men ever suffered by any British army in exchange for strategical advantages which are still a matter for doubt.

Mr. Owen puts forward a powerful case for Lloyd George, and it is difficult to see any excuse for Haig's blunder in choosing Passchendaele as the scene of the battle. On one part of the question, however, the author is unsatisfying. The great German offensive of 1918 can be held to show what could have happened in France any time after the Russian collapse if the strategical plan of attacking Germany from the Balkans had been followed against the counsels of Haig and Robertson. The question should surely be considered in a life of Lloyd George even if it depends on too many "ifs" to allow an answer. One "if," of another kind, may perhaps be considered with

profit. If we suppose that Passchendaele had been directed by General Lloyd George, a stormy Welsh petrel who had obtained his command in an irregular fashion, and if we further suppose that a fine upstanding Scots laird had been his distrustful Prime Minister, can it be supposed that after the disaster the Welshman would have retained his command, or that in later and critical years it would be possible to rescue his reputation at the expense of the Scotsman? Events fell out the other way round, and the Welshman's reputation is still harder to salvage than that of the Field-Marshal. It is instructive to compare the later careers of Haig and Nivelle. The British feeling for the charms of gentlemanliness can go to remarkable lengths.

No British politician, not even Sir Winston Churchill, was more loved by a whole nation, but the affair with the Welsh Wizard was brief, and the reaction from it persistent. A fashion set in, and remains, of seeing only his faults, and seeing them as unforgivable in his case whatever they may be elsewhere. He broke promises and told lies and collected money for his party in somewhat shocking ways. In this he was no different from, or worse than, most Prime Ministers and party leaders of the post-Gladstonian era, but while in other statesmen these failings are usually thought of as sorrowful necessities, in Lloyd George they are commonly held to show his essential nastiness. Nation-wide distrust and an irreparable political ruin seem to have affected his mind and judgement more than is usual in political life, and at the end the angry and embittered old man held a wrong opinion on almost every subject of importance. His death in 1945 was not an occasion for revising a harsh general opinion, a task this book boldly sets out to accomplish.

It is a very good book. It is written in a lurid journalistic style which sometimes degenerates into absurdity but for the most part is strangely well suited to its subject. An appalling mass of documentation has been heroically mastered. There are mistakes—there must be in a book this size—which should be corrected in a subsequent edition. Lloyd George's part in the Near East tangle has not been adequately studied, and the absurd and familiar allegation is implied that Sir Mark Sykes (in the Sykes-Picot negotiation), conducted a private policy without consulting the Prime Minister or the Foreign Office. Mr. Owen inclines to cover up Lloyd

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COLLINS

George's odious treatment of King George V which may be read about in Sir Harold Nicolson's biography, though he does explain satisfactorily why Lloyd George did not include Asquith in the delegation to the Peace Conference as the King suggested. Mr. Owen is at his very best when relating the events leading to Asquith's resignation, in which it may be said that Lloyd George acted honourably if only for the good reason that so many people were intriguing for him against Asquith that it would have been sheer folly for him to have done otherwise. But surely Mr. Owen ought

to have strengthened the strong case for his hero by remembering Balfour's remarkable judgement on Lloyd George's appointment to the Premiership. It is to be found in Balfour's biography by Mrs. Dugdale. "As you may imagine," he said to a member of his family, "I have no prejudices in favour of Lloyd George. I have opposed every political principle he holds—but I think he is the only man who can at this moment break down that wall of military red tape, and see that the brains of the country are made use of." Like others, Balfour underestimated the thickness of "that wall."

Christopher Sykes

SAINTS AND STATESMEN

IMPERIALISM is not always antithetical to liberty. Where there is a law higher than the law of the local ruler, the subject has somewhere to appeal if his local ruler turns tyrannous, and this can be a real safeguard. British Guiana, for example, is not as free as it might be, but it is very much freer than it would be if there had been no outside power to check the totalitarian PPP. Professor Perry Miller's book* shows that the same lesson may be learned from the early history of Massachusetts, where on more than one occasion the settlers had to look to London for the protection of their freedom and their lives.

The local rulers of 17th century Massachusetts were not wicked tyrants. They were virtuous tyrants, and servants of a Utopian ideal. That is what made them so terrible. Worldly tyrants are sometimes reformed, and the very incompetence of corrupt administration affords a measure of respite to the subject. Religious tyrants are impervious to moral pressure, and their governments are usually efficient.

The government of Massachusetts was in many ways exemplary. The rulers thought of themselves not merely as the elect of God, but as "visible saints." In truth they were men of great faith, strong will, and what used to be known as "clean lives." Unfortunately they were destitute alike of humility and compassion; indeed they would have thought it *wrong* to be humble and compassionate. Like totalitarian rulers of every time and place, they were hardest on their deviationists, on those who shared their broad desire to create a New Jerusalem in Massachusetts, but who had different ideas about the way it should be done.

Massachusetts received its charter in 1629. Already by the 1640's independent-thinking men were being silenced, jailed, or banished. The local rulers would have liked to have taken sterner measures; Mr. Miller says "the only restraint was a fear lest, if they went too far, Cromwell might intervene." The confusion in England towards the end of the 1650's gave the visible saints their chance. Baptists, Quakers, Lutherans were executed, following the most preposterous trials. It was spring of 1661 before "an order arrived from Charles II forbidding Massachusetts Bay to kill his

* *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province.* By PERRY MILLER. Geoffrey Cumberlege for Harvard University Press. 52s.

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subjects." The rulers were reduced to a "sudden obedience," but (I quote again from Mr. Miller) "upon the first hint of royal indifference" they began "a new series of whippings, some of them almost to death."

IT WAS the establishment of religious toleration as a cardinal principle of the reign of William and Mary in England which brought at first the pretence, and by degrees the reality of liberty to Massachusetts too; but an equally important contribution of the imperial power to the cause of American liberty was its protection of those New England colonies adjacent to Massachusetts, notably Connecticut and Rhode Island in which (no less than in Pennsylvania) the great tradition of American democracy took its first firm roots.

Much, too much, has been said about the nineteen witches who were executed in Salem Village. Mr. Miller deals with the episode in one brisk chapter, and this is quite enough. Witch trials were too universal a feature of 17th century Christendom for any very special importance to attach to those of Massachusetts. What is really conspicuous is the record of the Massachusetts Calvinists in their judicial murder of such people as William Robinson, Marmaduke Stevenson, William Leddra, and Mary Dyer, all Protestant Christians, all Americans of the finest kind, and all deviationists. Admittedly there were crackpots among those Christians who were persecuted. Lydia Wardwell and Deborah Wilson, who bore witness to their faith by walking naked through the streets, were no doubt neurotic. But what about such Calvinist leaders as Increase and Cotton Mather? To read about Cotton Mather's ecstatic sermons to people on the brink of the gallows is to be forcibly reminded of the Marquis de Sade, the necrophile as well as the "sadist" (for several others among the visible saints were flagellants).

THE question, to which Mr. Miller's book provides the most detailed answer of any that has yet appeared, is how did it all come about?

The Puritan settlers arrived in Massachusetts with a unified intellectual system and a distinct political ideal. They had learned that ideal from Calvin, but it was at least as old as Plato's *Republic*. They believed, as Plato did, that men

and women, though depraved, could yet live in an ideal society provided that they were governed by a hard-living intellectual minority and that there were sufficiently elaborate arrangements for the education and discipline of everybody, including the rulers themselves. The Massachusetts colonists were well equipped to realise this vision. They all accepted the necessity of self-denial and obedience. Their "social contract" was a conscious covenant with God. Their leaders were educated men, whose leadership was the reward of intellectual ability and not of wealth. Not only did they succeed in building a society without extremes of poverty and wealth, they resisted the natural tendency of the richer to accumulate power. The rule of visible saints in Massachusetts was about as near as any state has come to the rule of philosopher-guardians. Nowhere else in the world, except perhaps in Calvinist Scotland, was education and learning so much valued for its own sake. And life, for those who submitted to the rule of the visible saints, was not bad. But being Americans, and Americans of British origin, the settlers included some who would not submit, and these, of course, were the ones who suffered.

The rulers of Massachusetts were as apprehensive as Plato of the danger of their society "degenerating into democracy"; and considerations of expediency reinforced the call of duty to eliminate subversive elements. In fact there was no clear distinction for them between religious and political exigencies. Since their commands were (they thought) God's commands, resistance was blasphemous; and God, as the Old Testament (which they knew so much better than the New Testament) said, was a God of wrath.

Alas, however, the saints did not guard successfully against another danger Plato visualised, and that was one besetting the ruling class itself: the danger of intellectual decay. John Cotton, the first of three chief stewards of Massachusetts theocracy, began extremely well. He was a scholar and a gentleman of the best Protestant type. But his firmness of mind soon relapsed into a cankerous intolerance, and his heart, like Calvin's, went rotten with vanity. His successors, Increase and Cotton Mather, were inferior men to begin with; and they not only became more intolerant than John Cotton had ever been, they began also to slacken in those respects where the Puritan needs to

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book, that everything, good and bad, which happened in the 17th century was a necessary condition of what New England afterwards became.

Mr. Miller is probably right. If it had not been for the Utopian ordeal of Massachusetts, Americans might not have been so firmly convinced as they afterwards became that free government, however bad, is always better than totalitarian government, however good; and it was thanks to the solicitude of imperialists in London that the lesson of Massachusetts, painful as it was, was not more painful still.

Maurice Cranston

THE PERILS OF SANG-FROID

NATIONAL character is at once mythical and real, for our image of national character is a more or less effective guide to some parts of conduct. Consider the laborious scowlings and despair of perfectly amiable and contented Frenchmen, or the energetic womanising postures of adequately chaste and monogamous Americans. Imperturbability, an outward mask of unfeelingness, is our characteristic defensive posture. But many novelists tend to turn what is for most people no more than an occasional tactic of behaviour into an ideal of life, a useful mannerism into an admired style. The consequences—inarticulateness, indifference, resignation, withered emotions—are as unsatisfactory for fiction as they are impoverishing for life.

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bearing fables; they presume a fairly high degree of sensitivity and discernment in the reader; they are, that is to say, serious and genuine confrontations of the human condition; but they are rather dull. If a novel is worth reading at all it is worth reading twice. None of these books survives this rigorous test. For all their decent merits they fail to achieve the level of their authors' intentions, they are cultural commodities and not works of art. It is not exactly that paucity of experience, on account of which English life is often held to be an insufficient begetter of fiction, that is to blame. It is rather a kind of spiritual defeatism in the characters, an incapacity or unwillingness to respond to experience, that divests these stories of importance, of any real claim on our interest.

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METHUEN

an actress, now married and the mother of three children. With a rather breathtaking empirical competence she runs her Thames-side household singlehanded. A girl has been found dead in a houseboat some way along the river. Menace accumulates as she receives visits from the girl's brother, a sort of ruling-class tramp, and a detective who is conceived on painfully Graham Greene lines, constantly harking back in interior monologue to his experiences in Africa and comparing favourably the restraints of British police practice with what one was able to do to get the truth out of blacks. (There is another unfortunate chunk of stock Greene in Tom the lock-keeper, a widower with, of course, stomach-trouble, who entertains the following thoughts: "There was something to be thankful for and that was that he had a parcel of pound notes saved up under the bed and another in the back of the wardrobe. . . . If he died he'd have to leave it to the Holy Father like his wife had told him. Let him live another day and he could spend his money, cheat the Holy Father," etc., etc. I wonder how many Thames lock-keepers are Catholics. The point of this little device is, of course, to give the poor man some significance by putting a mystical edge on his surliness. But it is a bit too transparent.) It emerges that her husband is somehow involved with the dead girl and Julia has to swim over, evade the police guard, and retrieve the incriminating cigarette case her husband had missed and which she believes, rightly, to have been left behind at the houseboat the night before. All is not, however, what it appears. Her husband is not the girl's lover nor did he kill her. These roles are reserved for Campbell, a lovingly delineated horror who performs on radio parlour games and who is a pestering admirer of Julia's. The facts are that her husband had only recently picked up, or been picked up by, the girl and visited her on the night of her death to say he could not see her any more. So Julia's risky sortie for the defence of her family, if not in vain, has not quite the significance that she attached to it. The melodramatic potentialities of the situation remain unrealised. A close shave, one might feel, after which things could go on as before. But Julia and her husband, stunned and tongue-tied, ask themselves, "How are we going to live with this?" The answer, surely, is "quite easily"; the appropriate emotions are relief and shame,

in him for his drifting, in her for her suspicions. As far as they are concerned the whole incident is meaningless, all that is shown is the obvious: that he is still susceptible, but not excessively so, to the attractions of other women and that she will take serious risks for the sake of her family. So an awed gesture to the emotional oppressiveness of nothing at all has to be tacked on to escape a banal conclusion. The Thames-side surroundings are excellently done and the children, whose doings weave in and out of the main story, are effectively presented, particularly Wilkins, a school friend of one of Julia's daughters, a marvellous picture of pubertal boredom and sophistication.

THE position of Kate Christie's hero, Harold, in *Smith** is both odder and more poignant. A Cumberland squire in his thirties, lame from a war wound, he lives in the ghastly limbo created by his mother's insanity, always on call to create an atmosphere of applause for her and quite unable to detach himself from this most demanding duty of his station. On the other side of the lake lives Mary, a practical girl who runs a farm while her father, an entomologist, who seems never to leave the house, sits with mildly cynical remarks trembling for utterance on his tongue. Harold rows over to see Mary from time to time for a breath of emotional fresh air. This does not relax all the tensions of his constricted situation which are vicariously discharged through the nefarious activities of theft and lechery, à la Mary Webb, of his former batman Smith. The exact place of Smith in the economy of Harold's feelings is somewhat prosily and repetitively expounded; it is a good idea but it gets more explanation than it needs. This cannot be said of Mary's utterly mysterious dread that Harold should make Smith conscious of sin. Smith lets the cat out of the bag to Harold's mother about the visits across the lake and she at once cuts herself off from him and goes into a decline. Mary strangely takes on the job of nursing the sufferer and Harold thereupon cuts himself off from her. The mother dies and Mary departs, Harold plods along in a state of suspended animation. His release from this condition is pretty gratuitous. First, he is coaxed into proposing to the Vicar's daughter

* *Smith*. By KATE CHRISTIE. Collins. 10s. 6d.

by the good offices of some exaggeratedly bufferish neighbours (a specimen of Sir George's talk: "Good, good. Admirable woman. Saw her do Juliet in her youth. Must have told you many times. Beautiful woman, most beautiful woman. Your Father mad about her, oh quite. Used to go with him to the stage door, you know, that sort of thing.") What wakes him up is the horrified refusal of his future wife to be kissed and her insistence on separate rooms. (She has been shocked into this by witnessing some of Smith's Mary Webbish activities.) So he is liberated, but he might just as well have gone and shot himself, or, for that matter, have accepted the girl's chaste conditions. Intelligent, well-written, and often amusing, the book suffers from uncomfortable changes of tone, echoes of Cold Comfort Farm give place to hunting-field conversations reminiscent of Noël Coward and Gertrude Lawrence. But the real defect is the general dull Britishness of Harold and Mary. Tight-lipped they endure their fates and we are the losers from their numb taciturnity.

THE most bizarre novel of the group is Edward Crankshaw's *The Creedy Case*.^{*} Remarkably similar in its general lines to Christopher Sykes' *Song of a Shirt*, it is a much less good book. George is a young colonel who has been ordered to post a subordinate and, suspicious of dirty work, wants to know why. So, to the distress of his wife, the despair of his father, and the personal inconvenience of Peter, the stuffed-shirt narrator, he hurls himself against the bureaucratic top-dressing of the army, personified at one level by the disgusting General Cawdor (the type of heartless pusher of which there were, I think, two specimens in Sykes' book) and, reassuringly, at a higher level by the discreet and ritzy General Nixon. The book is suffused with an innocent John Buchan flavour which I took at first to be an elaborate joke. Molossol caviare and Pouilly Fuissé are consumed; people speak of the "War House" and the "Rag," and drop in for a swim at the R.A.C.; cousins conveniently happen to be on duty in the small hours at the nerve-centre of Nixon's organisation, and George's wife knows all about fishing, for "a devoted uncle owned the best

^{*} *The Creedy Case*. By EDWARD CRANKSHAW. Michael Joseph. 10s. 6d.

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beat on one of the East Coast rivers." In the course of saving George from the consequences of his enthusiasm, Peter finds that he is in love with George's wife; this feeling is reciprocated, but everything is covered over with the utmost secrecy and good taste. Creedy, the cause of all the fuss, is a Communist who pretends to George's wife that *his* wife is one and that he must stick by her, thus swathing an excellent and relevant principle in a calculating lie. This bit of irony causes some discomfort, but generally the political part of the story fails to connect with the personal part. The narrator delivers some gem-like utterances: "The world was full of Captain Creedys. They bred like rabbits and filled the provincial universities," and treats George's idea that the war should be fought for something more than survival with measureless sophisticated scorn. George, before his crusading fire is extinguished, is something like a human being, if a rather dull one, but Creedy is a cartoonist's figure and poor Peter is just too

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knowing to live. The characters of whom the author seems to approve—George's wife, General Nixon, and the narrator—are way beyond not knowing what they want; they have achieved the stoic pinnacle of not really wanting anything at all.

JOHN WATNEY has an excellent subject in *Common Love**—sex. His faint, pleasant, Candide-like hero learns through the agency of a nymphomaniac peasant-girl, of Captain Thorne and his Neapolitan beach-boy, and of an American millionairess and her Swedish girl-friend the unexceptionable lesson that things are not always what they seem. The three parts of the book hang rather loosely together since the hero, whose presence connects them, is too dim a figure to impress himself on what happens. So instead of what one feels was intended, an illumination of the nature of love, all one gets is a series of entertaining and peculiar incidents. The hero could very well have allowed himself to admit his love for Jacqueline by forgiving the indiscriminating nature of her appetites without the object-lessons in the polymorphousness of love provided by his contacts with homosexuality and Lesbianism. Mr. Watney is perhaps the victim of his own unpretentiousness.

THE stories in Viola Meynell's *Louise*† are for the most part exercises in a rigid formula. Eight of the twelve culminate in a mechanically brisk ironic twist. A wife brings her husband to heel and sets her anxiety about him to rest by the trivial contingency of taking exception to the way he eats boiled eggs; a farmer chases a neighbour for days to upbraid him for a piece of sharp practice and, confronting him at the summit of his wrath, finds he only wants to pass the time of day; a woman married to a middle-aged bachelor is excluded from the traditional observances of his single state and, unable to break in, sets up an independent social life, so her husband begins to ignore his old friends in order to insert himself into his wife's activities. For all their variety of

* *Common Love*. By JOHN WATNEY. Putnam. 10s. 6d.

† *Louise*. By VIOLA MEYNELL. James Barrie. 10s. 6d.

tone and setting, therefore, these stories are somewhat exasperatingly alike. What Miss Meynell is best at is the description of excessive, exaggerated emotional states, and what is good about the long title story is not the rather sour

ironical ending but the powerful depiction of the greedy, obsessed, invalid love of the heroine. Her deflationary technique consorts uncomfortably with this power, for it makes strong feelings seem ridiculous.

Anthony Quinton

THE POWER OF THE POLITICAL MYTH

IN HIS remarkable new book,* M. Raymond Aron poses to himself (and to us) the question of how the world has got into its present deplorable state, in which it is not impossible that a complete world empire, based on tyranny and denying the basic premisses of our Western tradition, may be established—and established largely because we have firmly refused to see what we are doing and consequently where we are going. We are living in an age of “total war,” of “hyperbolic war” as M. Aron puts it, and in this age all things—or, at any rate, all things evil—are possible, including the great and gross evil of calling the evil things good. As M. Aron reminds us, Hans Delbrück told his countrymen in the aftermath of the first “total war”: “Let them do as they will with us; there is one thing they cannot do: kill us.” We know better now. We are in an age of total barbarism in which the extermination of a race, class, or group is all in the day’s work. The extermination of the Armenians by the Turks in the First World War was taken as a sign of congenital barbarism. We are all in the same moral boat now.

How has this come about? M. Aron has devoted himself to two problems: the material problem of how and why war has taken this form—the revolutionary changes in military technique and their results; and the equally interesting and possibly more important prob-

lem of how this revolutionary change has been accepted, explained away, or even welcomed.

CENTRAL to M. Aron’s thesis is the power of the myth. In a very effective passage, he disentangles myth and reality in the left-wing doctrinaire’s views of socialism. For, as is shown, socialism is not now defended as an admittedly and proven superior way of organising economic life and increasing economic well-being, but as the label of an ideal society, not to be contrasted with existing individualist, mixed, or collectivist societies and assessed in terms of the probability of the ideal being made reality, but treated as the way to that abolition of “injustice” whose necessary existence in any human society these mythomanes find intolerable—so intolerable that they cannot bear to admit its existence in a society that, since it is “socialist,” must be just. It is an attitude peculiarly prevalent among the French intellectuals, the “just-over-the-party-line” thinkers. One has the impression that M. Aron would prefer the candour of a modern Barnave, demanding in the face of a new and more total September massacre, “And was this blood so pure?”

But it would be very unjust to M. Aron to suggest that all he has to offer at this level is the simple confrontation of the myth with the facts. That would be to fall into the trap of excessive simplicity which is the favourite pitfall of the intellectuals, the belief in one simple, overriding cause. No human situation

* *The Century of Total War*. By RAYMOND ARON, translated from the French by E. W. DICKES and O. S. GRIFFITHS. Derek Verschoyle. 25s.

is simple, has one cause and one cure. The doctrines that profess to explain the human situation in a simple fashion for that very reason confuse and do not explain. Thus the Leninist explanation of the First World War in terms of "imperialism" is no explanation, or at best is one small part of the explanation, but even such dim light as it does cast is paid for very dearly in the darkness that it throws over most of the scene, in the power of blinding that this simple doctrine conveys.

M. Aron's pet aversion, if such a term can be used of so cool a writer, is the use of phrases, dogmas, and slogans as realities; and some of the most effective passages in his book are exposures of myths and slogans like "the dictatorship of the proletariat." Equally repellent to M. Aron are excessively rigid categories, simple oppositions of "free enterprise" and "socialism." We live with mixed problems in a mixed society. A further error is the projection of our problems into the future, and the sacrifice of the present for some future of which we can only be certain that we do not know enough to justify giving up present undoubted good for uncertain future improvements. "Distant extrapolations, even on the plane of the theorists of economic progress are risky." And that, in turn, makes M. Aron sceptical of the enthusiastic revolutionaries who cheerfully and confidently condemn present generations to misery and unlimited risks in order to hasten the coming of a new order. "Pie in the sky" is peddled by more than old-fashioned religionists.

The central problem for us is the fact, and the character, of war. The greatest danger facing us is not an economic breakdown on the lines of 1929, or even the exhaustion of minerals or of the soil, or the excessive birth-rate in Asia, or the commonplace nightmares of the prophets of doom. It is total war itself. And war in modern times is not total only in the sense that it has hyperbolic weapons like the hydrogen bomb, but in that war is waged in a totalitarian spirit which not only limits and may destroy "freedom" in its old sense, but creates situations quite out of the control of the "governments" and forces them to run risks far greater than any prudent calculation could justify. As the war endures, this spirit replaces the aims with which the war was begun by expedients forced on the rulers by the character of the gigantic conflict itself. (Think

of the irony of a war, begun to save Poland, ending with the subjection of Poland to her traditional enemy, a subjection that the first defenders of Poland more or less innocently ratified.)

It is war, not doctrine and not propaganda, that has been the great revolutionary force of this age. It was war that gave Lenin his chance. He might have died in angry exile in Switzerland if the war of 1914 had not broken out, or if it had ended, say, in 1916. It was the Second World War that extended the authority of the Communist Party from Berlin to Hanoi. Nowhere has the industrial proletariat of the Marxist myth played the role theory assigned to it. True, Marxism supplies an explanation of the "necessity" of war in capitalist society, but there is no reason to believe that this explanation fits all, or most, of the facts.

The very firmness of the distinction between "socialist" and "capitalist" states is illusory, an example of "the irrefutable logic of schizophrenia." If there is this inevitable schism in the world, it is made by the doctrine, not explained by it. "Since 1945, the power of the Soviet Union has become such that the Kremlin ideology tends to give form to the real world. Stalin, by proclaiming the division of humanity into two camps and acting accordingly, himself created the coalition that his mythology postulates. . . . They (the rulers of Russia) have not succeeded, it is true, in giving the 'imperialist' alliance a coherence prohibited by the absence of a common religion, the weight of historic memories, and the democratic régime of the leading power. But in spite of everything Stalin succeeded in inspiring the countries of Europe, torn by age-long quarrels, with a certain feeling of solidarity. He cured the United States of isolationism. Perhaps the end result will be the creation of an Atlantic community, which would not be the last stage of capitalism but civilisation's best defence in the face of danger."

THIS is the "message" of M. Aron's remarkable tract for the times, but it would be unjust to stress exclusively the theme of the Atlantic Community and ignore the many brilliant *aperçus* that illustrate and illuminate the main theme. There is, for example, the brief but convincing explanation of why the French workman, highly individualist, heir of an anarchist tradition, fiercely insistent on the

importance of human dignity, is yet, politically, the follower of a party that is the agent of a political and social system that would put him in his place with a firmness and a severity that no capitalist régime in France has ever attempted. The French workman is led astray by a feeling, just in itself, that given his skill, given the place of big industry in France, society does not reward him adequately, economically or socially. But the sinner is not big business as such but the archaic, wasteful, rigid French economy of the small man, the small enterprise. It is the two million families, not the two hundred families, that are the enemies of the workers in the modern sectors of the French economy. Their overhead is more than the traffic will bear and the worker feels, if he does not understand, this. There is no evidence that "socialism" as such will alter this or that the workers in the nationalised Renault works feel morally and materially superior to the workers in Citroën. Each suffers from the rigidities of French economic life, some of them the result of "socialism."

M. Aron is equally firm that central to the European problem is a reconciliation between France and Germany and he does not see fundamental barriers in the way. He is less optimistic about Asia because he does not think that inconsistency, flat contradiction, and irrelevance necessarily prevent an armed doctrine from achieving great success. This may be deplorable but it is a fact and, to quote Burns not M. Aron, "facts are chieftains that winna ding." To notice this is the beginning of political wisdom.

D. W. Brogan

¶ Readers are advised that indexes for Vols. I and II of ENCOUNTER are available upon request.

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HALLAM TENNYSON, grandson of the poet, has published two volumes of short stories, *The Wall of Dust* and *Minds in Movement*. He recently completed a travel book on Yugoslavia, which Riders will publish early next year, and is now working on a biography of Vinoba Bhave. . . . MINOO R. MASANI has been at one time or another secretary of the Socialist Party of India, Mayor of Bombay, Ambassador to Brazil, and Member of the Indian Parliament. He is also a writer whose book, *Our India*, is an all-time best seller in his country. . . . HAROLD ROSENBERG is a poet and art critic who lives in New York. The essay we publish forms the preface to an English version of Marcel Raymond's *From Baudelaire to Surrealism*. . . . IGNAZIO SILONE's most recent novel, *A Handful of Blackberries*, was published by Jonathan Cape last spring. . . . JIBANANANDA DAS, who lives in Calcutta, is widely regarded as the most original Bengali poet since Tagore. . . . PETER WILES is a Fellow of New College, Oxford. . . . W. S. MERWIN, one of the leading younger American poets, has published two volumes of verse, and has just completed another, *Green For Beasts*, which will appear in the not too distant future. . . . WILLIAM PETERSEN is an American sociologist, on the faculty of the University of California, who has been making a study of Dutch population growth, which he refers to in his article as "one of demography's important unsolved puzzles." . . . R. S. THOMAS is a clergyman who lives in Montgomery, Wales. . . . MAURICE CRANSTON is the author of *Freedom: A New Analysis*, published in 1953 by Longmans. He is at present engaged in writing a book on John Locke, and will soon contribute a study of him to our "Men and Ideas" series. . . . ANTHONY QUINTON is a Fellow of All Souls, Oxford. . . . D. W. BROGAN's authoritative *Introduction to American Politics* was recently published by Hamish Hamilton.

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